

# **Black Seed: Issue 8**

**A journal of indigenous anarchy**

Various Authors

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# Welcome to the eighth edition of *Black Seed* journal.

This issue was meant to be published in the winter of 2020, but we were devastated in February by the passing of our co-editor, friend, lover, and *Black Seed* originator, Aragorn! Finishing this issue has been an unintentional practice in group mourning. Two obituaries from people with intimate relations to Aragorn! and *Black Seed* open this issue.

In addition, the world has been wracked by the COVID-19 pandemic, and although we at *Black Seed* quietly (and not so quietly) invite in the mayhem, one consequence of this pre-apocalyptic event is that this edition will sail more slowly than usual on the winds of distribution. We suspect it might not find its way to you until later this summer or fall.

In our last issue we labeled our changes up til now as being “a journal for Indigenous Anarchism” without explanation. Here we’ll flesh out that change at least a little more. This project was made by green anarchists who feel that a green anarchist perspective was incomplete. Sure, we started this project partly to distinguish ourselves from primitivism, but we are also dissatisfied with other perspectives called Green, like Green Capitalism, Social Ecology, and other fixed positions. We recognize Green Anarchism, Anarchism, and even ideological Indigeneity as moving targets. Those of us who are post-Indians tour the ideologies that poorly liberate us, full well knowing that the task remains ours, and celebrating that we have each other and the power to go beyond the language and limitations others have for us. This has been a true pleasure of publishing *Black Seed*.

Overall, 2019 was a great year for an Indigenous Anarchism, with this issue hinting at possible new directions, and with the IAC (Indigenous Anarchism Convergence), which happened over three days in Flagstaff in August and changed our ideas about different approaches to Indigenous anarchism. Generational, political, and cultural differences were in evidence and by the end of the weekend it was hard to point to a shared center of gravity. One of the big challenges of this issue, put together just a season after the IAC is that an IA perspective may just too big. Many people came to the event with perspectives and opinions that were quite different from the essays and one-on-one conversations we had had up till that point.

We have a range of feelings coming off of the tail end of the IAC event and about the consequences of Indigenous Anarchism as a whole. As you’ll read in “Fire Walk With Me” (one of two reportbacks from the IAC), “I witnessed an indigenous anarchism but it was unfamiliar to me, a Dine anarchist.” We are in that ecstatic space where we have more questions than answers. How do we respond to the questions, “Are we Indigenous or are we Dine, Anishi-naabe, Lakota?” Are we writing for a movement that does not exist yet, and maybe shouldn’t?

The project of *Black Seed* is to both state that we are here and that that matters, and to explore who we are, as an act of becoming, dialogue, and negotiation. In this issue, we mostly show this by way of interviews and an underlying tension.

It is a failure of our imagination that we find ourselves trapped by a fork in the road we call “activists vs do nothings” or “Critical thinkers vs idiots who charge in.” Of course we should want both-and-more or “everything all the time” but we find ourselves exhausted by the project of being all the things, with never a break, and no end to the self-critical lens that burns us all out. We know a tension exists. We need to do it all and support our friends who are doing the same. We need to have a bit more flexibility in our thinking and tolerance in our assertions. [suggested: This flexibility will, of course, look different in different contexts, which can make it difficult and complicated to recognize when we’re doing it badly or well.

The conversations in this issue follow up on these thoughts with provocative words from people on the ground. The O’odham Anti-Border Collective begin to parse the complications of having tribal land cross national boundaries, fighting development (roads) at the same time that a border wall is being built, and fighting for tribal sovereignty and spiritual preservation of land that is currently being desecrated. “Contrasts at the Boundary Lines” is an interview between two mixed people about preserving and living inside cultures under siege. The second installment of Aragorn!’s conversation with the Anpoat Duta Collective is a frank look at plea bargain math, relationships, and making decisions.

One issue a year is about what we are capable of as a small group in the Bay but we’d like to do at least two issues a year. In this pursuit this issue has been primarily compiled in collaboration with Indigenous Action and features voices that presented at the IAC (ie the content from this issue is primarily from AZ and the Southwest). Initially we had looked forward to a Southwest editorial collective emerging from the Indigenous Anarchist Convergence but that didn’t fully coalesce.

How do we support new writers with new ideas while also remembering old ideas, forgotten conflicts, and the lessons of bruises and torn muscles? To start, an Indigenous Anarchism is not merely a youth movement or a passing fad. We honor, attend to, and dismiss our elders because of our intimacy with them and not because they are segregated into a part of our life that we safely ignore or blow off. What is called critique in our urban intellectual circles may be called the wisdom of age or the experience of time in others.

*Black Seed* is a project for radical autonomist minds to gather and share ideas, using newsprint to do it. We would have liked to extend an invitation to all of you to continue (or start) to write good shit and to send it in, but with the passing of Aragorn!, the future of *Black Seed* is now uncertain. The “we” here is written with heavy hearts; Aragorn! contributed to this editorial and we finish it and this issue—perhaps the last—without him.

This re-calibration of *Black Seed* carries with it some of the growing pains you’d expect, and in some ways, the masochists in us crave more of it, as it’s in those tensions—where we feel like we’re breaking—that some of the most exhilarating growth occurs. This doesn’t happen with tokens of mutual deference and the same damn people writing the same damn shit. Beyond the contrived leftist self- and collective castigations, we seek out those hard conversations, which often have the humor of our ancestors (although that deft levity always seems to be the first casualty, rendering most discourse uncomfortably numb). Whether it’s a fierce call for radical centering, or forceful renouncement of stifling traditions, or lashing out at those already on the ground, these are the dialectics of ruins and ruination and they should be hard and messy and joyful and gut wrenching and for some reason, though we adorn ourselves with targets (for enemies and friends, fren-emies?) when we put ourselves “out there,” we manage to keep going. In Dine Bizaad the idea of a “where” is lived and strived for as, *Sa’a naghaf bik’e hozho* (over there

in old age is a future in harmony). The “who” and “how” is where the exquisite pain is, and if we truly seek to destroy a world, we must not be afraid of ruins.

# An Obituary for Aragorn! by Leona

This is a love letter.

Let's get some things out of the way. He was a slob, he needed someone who would clean after him. He didn't like dirt and mold and grunge, but would live with it until someone else came along and cleaned it up. Gendered? Duh. Oblivious about it? No. He was impatient and demanding. He was an outrageous gaslighter- without-abuse. He was a hoarder; he didn't give up on ideas for projects, and would buy things as both prod for, and reminder of, the projects he contemplated. He frequently put people in the position of doing things that they didn't know how to do. He wanted people to hear silences, to contemplate things that were unsaid, to pay attention, and while I would call that part of his native background, it is not separate from being a neglected child of a charismatic, poor, and abusive mother. Regardless, it's something that we can learn to do, and he was hurt when he wasn't offered that generosity by people he cared about. He forgot that not everyone had his options or abilities. He would yell and have temper tantrums in public and in private, and then get mad when people responded in ways he thought were not worthy of them—partly out of self interest, partly out of boredom, and partly out of concern: if you were able to be shut down by someone like him, who was only loud and smart, then how much worse would your life be around people who actually meant you ill? Strength, perseverance, stubbornness, reliability—these aspects of what could be called the same thing—were important and worth encouraging in yourself and others. I would say he was dismissive of people's fears, but supportive around our weaknesses, and that sometimes he could tell the difference between those two better than the people involved, but again, this is a love letter.

I'm trying to establish that I saw his faults as clearly as anyone saw them, sometimes as well as he did, to set the context for what's written here.

I am biased. I am one of the three romantic relationships in his life when he died, who lived with or adjacent to him, whose life was absolutely changed by him, who love him in that way that "love" is an inadequate word for. His three partners have been an advertisement for poly-amory, using our various skills in complementary ways to get through this immense grief (and to confuse the shit out of hospital staff and government bureaucrats). I say that not to share inappropriate personal information, but to say, this is who he was. He made it work, living near and with three stubborn, demanding, outspoken women. He loved strongly, and he didn't give up on people. He called giving up on people *genocide*, a white culture thing, and he was always ready to engage in a relationship again, even if it was uncomfortable for all concerned. (He could frequently be counted on to make it uncomfortable.)

But this is not why you're here. You're here because, among other things, he was a force of brilliance who said things no one else would say: incisive, wise, unexpected, funny, challenging. One of his skills— which he only started coming to terms with in his 30s—was the capacity to cut to the heart of a person, poking at something deeply personal and difficult, frequently as part of a quip or snark. Sometimes people could appreciate it, sometimes they couldn't. His whole life he dealt with the social consequences of saying these things, usually unplanned: words as true

as they were hard to hear, a reflection of how deeply and quickly he saw people, without even realizing that he had.

This ability of his also made him think that he was right more than he actually was. It's a weakness of very observant and clever people to forget or never learn how to be wrong. He died before he learned (or acknowledged learning) some of the lessons that are more likely after you turn 50. But he was getting there. He had already admitted what one could call The Lesson of Ramsey-at-AK- Press, aka the lesson of being the main face of a project that requires a public presence. Politics *firmly* aside, many of the aesthetic things that he disliked about the AK Press of the time—for example the focus on their own titles, the single-mindedness, the way that project fit into a capitalist context—he understood better as LBC went on. He made different choices, obviously, but it shifted his frustration.<sup>1</sup> But then, his aggravation with other projects like AK and infoshop was always, for him, more of a goad to achieve his own projects, to aim away from the inadequacies of the existent.<sup>2</sup>

He started projects, including *Black Seed*, when he felt a lack in the scene that he thought he could do something about. He put himself on the hook for meeting the needs he wanted met. Some people can probably recite this litany with me at this point: theanarchistlibrary.org, anarchy101.org, anarchistnews.org, *Black Seed*, theanvilreview.org/ *The Anvil Review*, thebrilliant.org, littleblackcart.com, anarchyplanet.org, anarchybang.org, just to name the biggest of the projects that he inspired, sweat over, and usually paid for, though of course part of his skill set was inspiring other people to participate, communicating both his own excitement and the need for This Excellent New Thing. He also thought of and helped organize many events (anarchist salons, bookfairs, the BASTARD conferences, a weekend anti-state commie and anarchist get-together) and hosted numerous anarchist projects, including ones he disagreed with: so many that I never knew all of them, or could keep track of all the things he was responsible for. We joked that it wasn't safe for him to go on road trips because every time he came back from his reflection time—being on the road and talking to different people—he had at least one huge new project idea to add to the growing pile, which, again, never got smaller. Projects, like relationships, didn't go away; at most they just got put on hold, until the rest of the world, his friends, his enemies, whatever, realized what they were missing.

There are not words in English to describe him.

Since he's died I keep trying to figure out how to say something about his capacity to think/feel deeply and in different directions from anyone else. I can't figure out how to say it even to myself, much less other people. None of my words begin to describe it. His friends used to talk about him being the smartest person they'd ever known, which is part of it, but... He wasn't just *smart*. He didn't just *care*. He moved in a different way from anyone I've ever known: in his thinking, in his life, in his inspiration, in his expectations. People don't have to be different to be amazing, awesome, lovable, life-changing. It is trite that I'm falling back on that language of

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<sup>1</sup> LBC started out as a distro project. He thought we'd be helping our friends who didn't know how to market themselves. We could be the reliable moneyhandlers, shippers, and receivers. But baby distros go away on the regular, and/or couldn't even get us their stuff, so LBC's mission changed.

<sup>2</sup> Someone once told me not to tell him that they were considering taking a job with AK, because they accurately assumed that he would be disgruntled with them for joining The Other Team. He certainly would've given them shit, teased them, poked at them for the weaknesses of that project, and for their lack of ambition. I expect he would've been disappointed that they wanted to keep it from him, rather than play with him (or at least let him play with them) about the sucky realities of capitalism and teams.



“being different” as a way to say something about him. Perhaps it is a weakness in my ability, perhaps a weakness in the language. Perhaps it is part of grieving, to acknowledge the things that I will never find again, to contemplate “never” as it becomes ever more relevant, personally, socially, globally.

All the characteristics that I started out with, trying to explain that I am not blind to the things that were frustrating or even enraging about him, are also things that I appreciate; they were parts of what I (and so many other people) found so heart- stoppingly special about him. That is one of the functions of love, I expect.

The following questions are for silent reflection but do with them as you will:

Is it possible to learn from someone else’s love? Is it worth writing this? Can sharing this most-beauti- ful-thing-that-ever-happened-to-me mean anything to strangers and acquaintances and frenemies and Enemies and friends who are reading this? Where does this fit into *Black Seed*, into nihilism, into anarchy, into the big ideas that are important to all of us? How gendered to have his partner write about her feelings! Do we let those labels—which are only ever semi-accurate at best— shut us down, or do we find orthogonal ways to use them? When I say “label” here, do I mean “gender” or do I mean “feelings”?

This is a love letter. Only one of many. *Some are funnier.*

There are not words in English.

*Black Seed* is a love letter too.

## Weary Warrior by Aunt Loretta

Weary Warrior  
Lie down and rest  
You've earned your colors  
And worn them well  
Your voice is heard no more  
Yet your words are etched in our minds  
And we hear them still  
Too early you are gone from us  
We mourn your passing  
But like legends of old  
You will live forever in our hearts and minds  
Goodbye, son, lover, brother, friend Rest now in the arms of those gone before  
Who welcome you, Weary Warrior

# The Burden of Our Travels by Klee Benally

I first met Aragorn in 2011 at a protest. I had organized a rally against ski area expansion and snowmaking with treated sewage desecration on one of our sacred mountains here near so-called Flagstaff, Arizona. Picture the typical activist theatre: holding signs and banners, chanting, in front of City Hall and oh yes, a megaphone. My friend Drew Sully, who was the most anarchist of the white anarchists (sorry Brian) in the dry desert wastelands of so-called Arizona drove up for this special occasion. A connection to his friend Aragorn who was giving some talk or something in occupied O'odham lands of "Phoenix." You see, we had done some fun agitation with a Dine O'odham Anarchist bloc and had a particular configuration that was working.

So, I met A! and we talked a bit while he assisted and held one side of a massive banner that read, "Protect Sacred Sites, Defend Human Rights."

After the demo (I'm using that term so it's printed in Black Seed (BS), fight me) we met at the old location of Taala Hooghan Infoshop. It was a small space so close to a nail salon that we got contact high from the chemicals while stapling zines.

I think anyone who has seen me and A! in the same room knows this, but we wouldn't fucking stop talking. Really, if you've read the interviews or heard the podcasts, that was us, all the time, we seriously wouldn't shut up. If we could we would talk each other to sleep, and actually, we nearly did so many times throughout the years.

In retrospect I think Drew's intentions were to fuck up my life by introducing me to Aragorn, 'cause that's what really happened and that's a bit what this story is about.

I had a cautious relationship with Anarchism at that point. While I read and studied the requisite materials and had read and been familiar with A!'s work (initially through Green *blech* Anarchy) and we had copies of his zines at our infoshop. I still resisted the anarchist identity that was impossible to ignore due to its cliched overwhelming whiteness.

So at our first meeting A! said this, "I'm an anarchist without adjectives."

He was a bit smug but that was endearing. He had a gift of seeing things for what they were and a greater gift that... I guess the only way to describe it is like he had already read the end of the book and there was a great big joke in the final chapter. That was one thing that I don't want off the record: he was witty fucking hilarious. Sometimes our conversations felt like rehearsal for a stand up show that no one would ever ever want to attend...

I have a shitty memory so this isn't really chronological. It's a punk-rock collage of the moments that mattered most to me. I like to reflect this way because it hit me hard when he passed. I had just talked with him the day before and we were messaging and talking to each other regularly. The last thing he messaged me about BS was regarding our collaboration on this issue's editorial, "I'll see if there are any changes to discuss. btw after looking at the new version I am excited about this issue again. :-)" and yes, he put the nose in there. I don't like writing this but I think it's worth offering since there is one massive brilliant conversation A! was having with a lot of people and perhaps this tiny bit of imperfect cartography is somehow useful.

Every once in a while A! would travel through on his fancy motorcycle. I'm not a bike person so I can't recall the build, but ya know. He always looked road weary by the time he got here, but the 17 or the 10 will do that. Sometimes his stops were quick, like he'd have a book fair or other event and we were a rest point. He'd have a few questions and hit record. We'd keep going and at some point he'd look up and sleepily say, "I'm done." the recorder would go off and we'd keep talking. Like when he presented on "conflict infrastructure" at Taala Hooghan after his trips through Europe back in 2013. The in- foshop calendar had this listing:

Mon. 30th - A conversation about Conflict Infrastructure with Aragorn! 5:30PM

A speaking tour with a cart full of books.

*"...We will talk about our experiments in conflict infrastructure and, if we are successful, re-transmit an old idea. For anarchism (by the name) to survive the new cold wind of this world, we have to build something to warm our bones. For the stories of anarchy (dramatic and small) to be told, there has to be a circle of friends, comrades, lovers, and fren-emies. Conflict is the left hand of anarchy but something like home is the right. Let us sit together and warm our hands on these topics."*

<https://aragorn.anarchyplanet.org/2013/08/15/conflict-infrastructure/>

This was one of the most fun conversations and provided the direction for a shift in our organizing strategy at Taala Hooghan Infoshop (see, damn you Drew, life-fucking-up right there!).

I'm pretty sure this is when I actually saw A!'s master yoyo skills: such a geek.

Later that same year I helped organize an event called "Fire At The Mountain." It was listed as an Anarchist/Anti-colonial bookfair with workshops and discussions such as "We are Un-governable: A Discussion on Indigenous Liberation, Anarchy & Allies," "Second Wave Anarchy An introduction to anarchist ideas since 1968 by Aragorn!," and "Anarchist - What We Need To Be by John Zerzan."

I remember sitting there waiting for John and A! to either have a dance off, makeout, or something to break the tension. But they just had a lively back and forth at each other's Q&A's and that was it. sorta a let down if you ask me, but I guess we got enough kicks from the whole At-tassa shitshow (I can say fuck ITS and send love to LBC at the same time, but I dont think very many people even read LBC's statement on the issue)...

Overall this event was shiny and in many ways one of the best ways that we presented an idea of what our work at Taala Hooghan Infoshop was about and a direction that was complementary in so many ways to the informal work that A! and I had started on.

For some reason A! invited me to present at the East Bay Anarchist Bookfair in 2014, perhaps it was reciprocity. I played an intimate show at the Long Haul Infoshop then talked about "Dis-mantling Decolonial Fetishism." It was a busy time. It was great to experience the Little Black Cart family in action.

I share these events and moments because they all really led up to the Indigenous Anarchist Convergence held last year August 2019 at Taala Hooghan.

Before that though, I just want to say that I really think you should read or re-read *The Fight for Turtle Island* and "Locating an Indigenous Anarchism" (reprinted in this issue). This is the best window into who A! was. Not the conflictual troll of trolls or nihilist pariah. I'm not sure how many people had the chance to sit with A! and his aunt in the same space together but this was him. She's a typical Native elder auntie, you know, the one who is quiet but if needed she'll cuss

up a storm and laugh about it. We had Thai food with lots of family. He ate something vegan. He was courteous.

I never got to see him at his lows, I think I would have appreciated that. I really thought that at some point we would grow to hate each other and I looked forward to that cycle and possibly making amends. But that never came.

Back to the Indigenous Anarchist Convergence (IAC) because I did think we would hate each other after it ('cause isn't that how radical "communities" work?). So what you read in the editorial and what you'll read in the report-backs are one part of it. We had some great conversations planning the IAC and at one point A! said he was thinking of not attending. Apparently the specter of oogle animosity was concerning in some part of so-called Arizona. I told him he didn't have a choice and that his attendance was required. As the event drew closer the excitement mounted. There appeared to be such a strong energy (just using that word to piss A! off now) and momentum that it was really a necessary moment in a discussion that was occurring for years now. We discussed his ideas for BS as an Indigenous Anarchist Journal and how we could try to establish a Southwest editorial collective to hold one issue down. He imagined what it would look like to have Indigenous anarchist editorial collectives take an issue each year or so and make the content useful for them. It was an exciting proposal.

A! attempting to drive his motorcycle to Big Mountain in the middle of the night on an impossible road for a street bike. Sitting in a hogan with Dine elder matriarchs discussing their autonomous lives. A! making frybread. Going back to my place and complaining about the same shit. Eating super hot salsa and telling ridiculous stories. Horrible Native jokes. Waking up early, sharing organizational frustrations, him challenging my stewing on problems that weren't mine. Sometimes I'm transparent. We talked like family. That meant we had no pretenses and trusted each other. We had incredibly different paths culturally and to a large degree, politically. We could have fought, but we didn't.

He didn't like my activist resume and I didn't give a shit. That was a fun tension and we would joke then the work or discussions would continue. You see, we were always conspiring.

When we started writing the editorial on a riseup pad it was awkward. We were so used to talking it seemed artificial. The notes were surprising, at one point I thought he was channeling Starhawk (sorry, cheap dig, couldn't help it). We were almost finished editing when he passed. So now it's broken. Like a piece of old pottery scattered by ruins. There are fragments. Even in our calls to organize and complete this issue. It's trudging. It's broken. It's incomplete. And that is what also makes it beautiful.

When we honor someone's life it is not to place them on a pedestal and ignore the rough edges and imperfections. That would betray the brilliant complexities of all of our humanity. I appreciated A! more for his honesty and constant biting exploration (here he would say, ah, you like adjectives). His impulse towards challenging those complexities and sharing the process-of, made him and his ways such an incredible autonomous force.

He wasn't afraid to make a mess or elicit animosity.

When I first read *The Fight for Turtle Island* I was a little frustrated that the topics were edited after our conversation and that conversations just paused. But now I appreciate it. In some ways it's the best eulogy out there. I can reread that book and stop in our conversations and think about when they'll begin again.

I miss this. But it's still there, and that I'm deeply grateful for. Thanks for fucking up my life in the best way dear brother. We'll see much more though and yes, it's a bit of waiting but it's also a bit of fucking shit up. we're not done yet, not by far.

I wrote this for A!'s family Ariel and Leona after he passed. It's for them but of course, you've realized this by now, this whole issue is for them:

*Even if they don't recognize your words, they know your voice  
The ancestors have called you home To the world beyond worlds  
Your voice joins theirs In songs that know  
no time  
The burden of our travels Are those left behind  
But this is your ceremony  
Winter sleeps the trees A bitter chill on our lips Eyes closed  
Everything  
In  
Cycles*

# Locating An Indigenous Anarchism by Aragorn!

First published in *Green Anarchy*, 2005

It's easy enough to hedge about politics. It comes naturally and most of the time the straight answer isn't really going to satisfy the questioner, nor is it appropriate to fix our politics to this world, to what feels immovable. Politics, like experience, is a subjective way to understand the world. At best it provides a deeper vocabulary than mealy-mouthed platitudes about being good to people, at worst (and most commonly) it frames people and ideas into ideology. Ideology, as we are fully aware, is a bad thing. Why? Because it answers questions better left haunting us, because it attempts to answer permanently what is temporary at best.

It is easy to be cagey about politics but for a moment let us imagine a possibility. Not to tell one another what to do, or about an answer to every question that could arise, but to take a break from hesitation. Let us imagine what an indigenous anarchism could look like.

We should start with what we have, which is not a lot. What we have, in this world, is the memory of a past obscured by history books, of a place clear-cut, planted upon, and paved over. We share this memory with our extended family, who we quarrel with, who we care for deeply, and who often believe in those things we do not have. What we do have is not enough to shape this world, but is usually enough to get us by.

If we were to shape this world (an opportunity we would surely reject if we were offered), we would begin with a great burning. We would likely begin in the cities where with all the wooden structures of power and underbrush of institutional assumption the fire would surely burn brightly and for a very long time. It would be hard on those species that lived in these places. It would be very hard to remember what living was like without relying on deadfall and fire departments. But we would remember. That remembering wouldn't look like a skill-share or an extension class in the methods of survival, but an awareness that no matter how skilled we personally are (or perceive ourselves to be) we need our extended family.

We will need each other to make sure that the flames, if they were to come, clear the area that we will live in together. We will need to clear it of the fuel that would end up repeating the problems we are currently having. We will need to make sure that the seeds, nutrients and soil are scattered beyond our ability to control.

Once we get beyond the flames we will have to craft a life together. We will have to recall what social behavior looks and feels like. We will have to heal.

When we begin to examine what life could be like, now that all the excuses are gone, now that all the bullies are of human size and shape, we will have to keep in mind many things. We will have to always keep in mind the matter of scale. We will have to keep in mind the memory of the first people and the people who kept the memory of matches and where and when to burn through the past confusing age. For what it is worth we will have to establish a way to live that

is both indigenous, which is to say of the land that we are actually on, and anarchist, which is to say without authoritarian constraint.

## First Principles

First principles are those perspectives that (adherents to) a tendency would understand as immutable. They are usually left unstated. Within anarchism these principles include direct action, mutual aid, and voluntary cooperation. These are not ideas about how we are going to transform society or about the form of anarchist organization, but an understanding about what would be innovative and qualitatively different about an anarchist social practice vis-à-vis a capitalist republic, or a totalitarian socialism.

It is worth noting a cultural history of our three basic anarchist principles as a way of understanding what an indigenous anarchist set of principles could look like. Direct action as a principle is primarily differentiated from the tradition of labor struggles, where it was used as a tactic, in that it posits that living ‘directly’ (or in an unmediated fashion) is an anarchist imperative. Put another way, the principle of direct action would be an anarchist statement of self-determination in practical aspects of life. Direct action must be understood through the lens of the events of May ’68 where a rejection of alienated life led large sections of French society into the streets and towards a radically self-organized practice.

The principle of mutual aid is a very traditional anarchist concept. Peter Kropotkin laid out a scientific analysis of animal survival and (as a corollary to Darwin’s theory of evolution) described a theory of cooperation that he felt better suited most species. As one of the fathers of anarchism (and particularly Anarcho-Communism) Kropotkin’s concept of mutual aid has been embraced by most anarchists. As a principle it is generally limited to a level of tacit anarchist support for anarchist projects.

Voluntary cooperation is the anarchist principle that informs anarchist understandings of economics, social behavior (and exclusion), and the scale of future society. It could be stated simply as the principle that we, individually, should determine what we do with our time, with whom we work, and how we work. Anarchists have wrestled with these concepts for as long as there has been a discernible anarchist practice. The spectrum of anarchist thought on the nuance of voluntary cooperation ranges from Max Stirner who refuses anything but total autonomy to Kropotkin whose theory of a world without scarcity (which is a fundamental premise of most Marxist positions) would give us greater choices about what we would do with our time. Today this principle is usually stated most clearly as the principle to freely associate (and disassociate) with one another.

This should provide us with enough information to make the simple statement that anarchist principles have been informed by science (both social and physical), a particular understanding of the individual (and their relation to larger bodies) and as a response to the alienation of modern existence and the mechanisms that social institutions use to manipulate people. Naturally we will now move onto how an indigenous perspective differs from these.

In the spirit of speaking clearly I hesitate in making the usual caveats when principles are in question. These hesitations are not because, in practice, there is any doubt as to what the nature of relationship or practice should look like. But when writing, particularly about politics, you can do yourself a great disservice by planting a flag and calling it righteous. Stating principles as



the basis for a politic usually is such a flag. If I believe in a value and then articulate that value as instrumental for an appropriate practice then what is the difference between my completely subjective (or self-serving) perspective and one that I could possibly share usefully? This question should continue to haunt us.

Since we have gone this far let us speak, for a moment, about an indigenous anarchism's first principles. Insert caveats about this being one perspective among many. Everything is alive. Alive may not be the best word for what is being talked about but we could say imbibed with spirit or filled with the Great Spirit and we would mean the same thing. We will assume that a secular audience understands life as complex, interesting, in motion, and valuable. This same secular person may not see the Great Spirit in things that they are capable of seeing life in.

The counterpoint to everything being filled with life is that there are no dead things. Nothing is an object. Anything worth directly experiencing is worth acknowledging and appreciating for its complexity, its dynamism and its intrinsic worth. When one passes from what we call life, they do not become object, they enrich the lives they touched and the earth they lie in. If everything is alive, then sociology, politics, and statistics all have to be destroyed if for no other reason but because they are anti-life disciplines.

Another first principle would be that of the ascendance of memory. Living in a world where complex artifices are built on foundations of lies leads us to believe that there is nothing but deceit and untruth. Our experience would lead us to believe nothing less. Compounding this problem is the fact that those who could tell us the truth, our teachers, our newscasters and our media devote a scarce amount of their resources to anything like honesty. It is hard to blame them. Their memory comes from the same forgetfulness that ours does.

If we were to remember we would spend a far greater amount of our time remembering. We would share our memories with those we loved, with those we visited, and those who passed by us. We will have to spend a lot of time creating new memories to properly place the recollection of a frustrated forgetful world whose gift was to destroy everything dissimilar to itself.

An indigenous anarchism is an anarchism of place. This would seem impossible in a world that has taken upon itself the task of placing us nowhere. A world that places us nowhere universally. Even where we are born, live, and die is not our home. An anarchism of place could look like living in one area for all of your life. It could look like living only in areas that are heavily wooded, that are near life-sustaining bodies of water, or in dry places. It could look like traveling through these areas. It could look like traveling every year as conditions, or desire, dictated. It could look like many things from the outside, but it would be choice dictated by the subjective experience of those living in place and not the exigency of economic or political priorities. Location is the differentiation that is crushed by the mortar of urbanization and pestle of mass culture into the paste of modern alienation.

Finally an indigenous anarchism places us as an irremovable part of an extended family. This is an extension of the idea that everything is alive and therefore we are related to it in the sense that we too are alive. It is also a statement of a clear priority. The connection between living things, which we would shorthand to calling family, is the way that we understand ourselves in the world. We are part of a family and we know ourselves through family. Leaving aside the secular language for a moment, it is impossible to understand oneself or one another outside of the spirit. It is the mystery that should remain outside of language that is what we all share together and that sharing is living.

## **Anarchist in spirit vs. Anarchist in word**

Indigenous people in general and North American native people specifically have not taken too kindly to the term anarchist up until this point. There have been a few notable exceptions (Rob los Ricos, Zig Zag, and myself among them) but the general take is exemplified by Ward Churchill's line "I share many anarchist values like opposition to the State but..." Which begs the question why aren't more native people interested in anarchism?

The most obvious answer to this question is that anarchism is part of a European tradition so far outside of the mainstream that it isn't generally interesting (or accessible) to non-westerners. This is largely true but is only part of the answer. Another part of an answer can be seen in the surprisingly large percentage of anarchists who hold that race doesn't matter; that it is, at best, a tool used to divide us (by the Man) and at worst something that will devolve society into tribalism [sic]. Outside of whether there are any merits to these arguments (which I believe stand by themselves) is the violation of two principles that have not been discussed in detail up until this point — self-determination and radical decentralization.

Self-determination should be read as the desire for people who are self-organized (whether by tradition, individual choice, or inclination) to decide how they want to live with each other. This may seem like common sense, and it is, but it is also consistently violated by people who believe that their value system supersedes that of those around them. The question that anarchists of all stripes have to answer for themselves is whether they are capable of dealing with the consequences of other people living in ways they find reprehensible.

Radical decentralization is a probable outcome to most anarchist positions. There are very few anarchists (outside of Parecon) that believe that an anarchist society will have singular answers to politics, economy, or culture. More than a consequence, the principle of radical decentralization means it is preferable for there to be no center.

If anarchists are not able to apply the principles of self-determination to the fact that real living and breathing people do identify within racial and cultural categories and that this identification has consequences in terms of dealing with one another can we be shocked that native people (or so-called people of color) lack any interest in cohabitating? Furthermore if anarchists are unable to see that the consequence of their own politic includes the creation of social norms and cultures that they would not feel comfortable in, in a truly decentralized social environment, what hope do they have to deal with the people with whom they don't feel comfortable today?

The answer is that these anarchists do not expect to deal with anyone outside of their understanding of reality. They expect reality to conform to their subjective understanding of it.

This problem extends to the third reason that native people lack interest in anarchism. Like most political tendencies anarchism has come up with a distinct language, cadence, and set of priorities. The tradition of these distinctions is what continues to bridge the gap between many of the anarchist factions that have very little else in common. This tradition is not a recruiting tradition. There is only a small evangelical tradition within anarchism. It is largely an inscrutable tradition outside of itself.

This isn't a problem outside of itself. The problem is that it is coupled with the arrogance of the educated along with the worst of radical politics' excesses. This is best seen in the distinction that continues to be made of a discrete tradition of anarchism from actions that are anarchistic. Anarchists would like to have it both ways. They would like to see their tradition as being both a growing and vital one along with being uncompromising and deeply radical. Since an anarchist

society would be such a break from what we experience in this world, it would be truly different. It is impossible to perceive any scenario that leads from here to there. There is no path.

The anarchist analysis of the Zapatistas is a case in point. Anarchists have understood that it was an indigenous struggle, that it was armed and decentralized but habitually temper their enthusiasm with warnings about a) valorizing Subcommandante Marcos, b) the differences between social democracy and anarchism, c) the problems with negotiating with the State for reforms, etc. etc. These points are valid and criticism is not particularly the problem. What is the problem is that anarchist criticism is generally more repetitive than it is inspired or influential. Repetitive criticisms are useful in getting every member of a political tendency on the same page. Criticism helps us understand the difference between illusion and reality. But the form that anarchist criticism has taken about events in the world is more useful in shaping an understanding of what real anarchists believe than what the world is.

As long as the arbiters of anarchism continue to be the wielders of the Most Appropriate Critique, then anarchism will continue to be an isolated sect far removed from any particularly anarchistic events that happen in the world. This will continue to make the tendency irrelevant for those people who are interested in participating in anarchistic events.

## **Native People are not gone**

For many readers these ideas may seem worth pursuit. An indigenous anarchism may state a position felt but not articulated about how to live with one another, how to live in the world and about the decomposition. These readers will recognize themselves in indigeneity and ponder the next step. A radical position must embed an action plan, right?

No, it does not.

This causality, this linear vision of the progress of human events from idea to articulation to strategy to victory is but one way to understand the story of how we got from there to here. Progress is but one mythology. Another is that the will to power, or the spirit of resistance, or the movement of the masses transforms society. They may, and I appreciate those stories, but I will not finish this story with a happy ending that will not come true. This is but a sharing. This is a dream I have had for some time and haven't shown to any of you before, which is not to say that I do not have a purpose...

Whether stated in the same language or not, the only indigenous anarchists that I have met (with one or three possible exceptions) have been native people. This is not because living with these principles is impossible for non-native people but because there are very few teachers and even fewer students. If learning how to live with these values is worth anything it is worth making the compromises necessary to learn how people have been living with them for thousands of years.

Contrary to popular belief, the last hope for native values or an indigenous world-view is not the good hearted people of civilized society. It is not more casinos or a more liberal Bureau of Indian Affairs. It is not the election of Russell Means to the presidency of the Oglala Sioux Tribe. It is patience. As I was told time and time again as a child "The reason that I sit here and drink is because I am waiting for the white man to finish his business. And when he is done we will return."

“For what it is worth we will have to establish a way to live that is both indigenous, which is to say of the land that we are actually on, and anarchist, which is to say without authoritarian constraint.” – Aragorn!

“My ancestors wanted autonomy and I want that too.” – JD

“We have lived here long before the US government, and we will continue to live here long after it is gone.” – Diné relocation resister.

# Indigenous Anarchist Convergence – Report Back 1

11.3.19

Kinlani/Flagstaff, AZ — **More than 120 participants and over 30 groups and organizations converged** at Táala Hooghan Infoshop to discuss, debate, and share their perspectives on *Indigenous Anarchism*.

The initial call-out for the convergence stated, “...we call for those also seeking a fulfilling life free from domination, coercion, & exploitation to gather around this fire. For those sickened by fascinations with dead white-men’s thoughts (and their academies and their laws), reformist & reactionary “decolonial activisms”, and the uninspired merry-go-round of leftist politics as a whole. For all those ungovernable forces of Nature...”

Though leftist reactions were often replicated and much time was spent with well rehearsed presentations, the primary goals of coming together and interrogating the propositions of Indigenous Anarchism were fulfilled. We were also able to coordinate this gathering with a budget of less than \$800 (thanks to everyone online who donated!) as we relied heavily on the mutual aid from many of our relatives in Kinlani who cooked, donated food, opened up their homes, and volunteered to support. In those terms the convergence could be counted as a success, but what we share in this report back should not be viewed as a celebration. This in no way represents everything that was discussed, challenged, debated, or expressed. Perhaps this incomplete offering written from memory, limited recordings, and scrapped together notes, should be seen more as fragments of stones with which we can sharpen ourselves on.

**When we put the save the date out for the Indigenous Anarchist Convergence (IAC)** we had a focus set on a regional dialogue that would be shaped primarily by those who were fairly familiar with the ideas we’ve been working on, we did not anticipate the overwhelming response from people throughout the so-called US. We also specifically invited those few voices who we’ve read or directly talked with in great length about Indigenous Anarchism (some who couldn’t make it), and with that we knew we were inviting controversial people and that the potential for pushback was serious. The schedule was planned as one track and packed with discussions and workshops. Though each session was given substantial time (some over two hours), we shifted, waited, and went overtime as these functions inevitably do.

**A preliminary gathering was held at Big Mountain** hosted by Louise Benally and her family who have been resisting forced relocation by remaining on their ancestral homelands. This area has been declared the Sovereign Diné Nation by the residents who assert their autonomy free from US and tribal government control. Though only a few participants from the convergence attended, the connections and discussions (primarily in Diné bizaad), addressed land-based struggles, climate change, coal mining, traditional medicines, and autonomy.

The gathering also became a celebration of the shutdown of Navajo Generating Station, a coal fired power plant operating in the region, which ran its last train of coal just the day before. Diné

elder matriarchs Rena Babbit Lane & Ruth Baikedy joined the next day as John Benally shared an herb walk then addressed the geo-politics of the so-called Navajo-Hopi Land dispute. Overall the preliminary gathering, which was held at a traditional hogan with no running water or electricity, demonstrated the strength and resolve of traditional ways of life that are the backbone of the autonomous resistance at Big Mountain.

**On Friday evening at Táala Hooghan infoshop**, the convergence started with a prayer by traditional practitioner Jones Benally that connected the gathering to the sacred mountains within which we were welcoming everyone.

A statement was made that “this gathering is going to be messy, mistakes will be made, yet we are excited with that and what possibilities may come from this. Though this convergence may be premature and we may not have the entire capacity to host, we did not want to wait for this to happen, we wanted to push the conversations forward so that we can intervene in the current shitty political realities we face in more direct and effective ways. We also do not want you to participate expecting this convergence to be an annual affair, as we would then face the trap of Indigenous anarchism being defined by our context and our terms, we know this gathering would look very different if it were to be held in your lands and that you would do some things very differently than us. We would offer that the next convergence be hosted elsewhere so please think about while being here.” A statement was also issued the infoshop could not guarantee it was a safe space, but that it should be viewed as a threatening space to all forms of oppressive behaviors and that known abusers, particularly perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence, would be kicked out of the gathering.

**On the Indigenous front** there were several distinct tensions addressed.

Discussions on “good vs bad traditionalism” including a challenge to “not romanticize a pre-contact utopia” with a primary focus on gender were prevalent throughout the weekend.

On the panel “Locating an Indigenous Anarchism, Chris Finley stated, “I want to make sure that Indigenous queer people, two spirit people are sacred people. Queerness is not a result of colonization, that idea is fucked up. I want to make sure that we are sacred parts of our community. One of the things that we can do, while the settlers get their shit together, is work on homophobia in our communities, because that is a huge part of how the settler state maintains power, and these are things that we can work on now.”

Brandon Benallie, of Ké’ Infoshop stated, “Traditionalism is not the same as our life ways. Traditionalism is like a museum piece that sits on a shelf and gets old, whereas our life ways are accumulating knowledge and always growing, it’s the people getting old who don’t want to grow.”

Another question was “how do we address movement policing elders or the elders who tell us go back to camp?” This primarily related to experiences in Standing Rock where elders held people back at the frontlines. Anecdotes were shared that provided no clear tactic other than recognizing that there are “elders and those who get older,” and it’s our challenge to understand how to address that dynamic based upon the situations in our communities. Julie Richards aka MAMA Julz, a water protector from the Mothers Against Meth Alliance, stated, “I want to be one of those elders who still locks down on the front lines to save our lands and future generations.”

Identity politics was also prevalent, including an assertion of the lack of centering of trans & afro-Indigenous voices. Issues of identify policing were challenged specifically with so-called “white passing” Indigenous Peoples. This brought up questions of settler colonial attempts at “paper genocide.” An afro-Indigenous trans person voiced that their struggle was one in which

they are, “hated by society and the people you fight for.” Multiple calls were made to ensure that organizing spaces center trans and afro-Indigenous voices. Calls were also made to confront anti-blackness in Indigenous organizing (such as cooptation of Black Lives Matter by Native Lives Matter) and to ensure inclusivity in the movement to stop Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (#mmiw) by adding #mmiwgts to include trans and two spirit relatives who face further disproportionate hetero-patriarchal violence.

Land and place were central to nearly all conversations though some points were made that, “If Indigenous means of the earth, who is not an Indigenous anarchist?” and a concern that use of the term “turtle island” was too limiting or exclusive of a term. These tensions led some participating Diné and other Indigenous Peoples to clarify that their anarchism is a specific tendency due to their distinct cultural contexts.

**The term “decolonization” seemed to have a heavier weight** in the midst of these discussions as it was used very sparingly. Though in some ways the “decolonial” dynamics played out much as they do in other circles. The term “decolonization” is used in both radical and liberal spaces as an empty rhetorical buzzword, this is quite often seen in performative “land acknowledgements” when it should be meaningfully used with and in respect to the Indigenous Peoples’ whose lands we are on. That dynamic was most clear from those who came to the convergence from large cities. In some ways their contexts felt distant and alienating, which is a dynamic we usually brace ourselves to face from academics, so it was concerning though not surprising in relation to the space and ways in which our cultural protocols were ignored and in some ways disrespected.

JD from so-called Canada spoke to the current “reconciliatory” efforts by the state to address genocide of Indigenous Peoples and addressed how “there can be no reconciliation that recognizes the self-determination of Indigenous peoples so long as the state of Canada exists... My ancestors wanted autonomy and I want that too.”

**On the anarchist front** there surprisingly seemed to be less disagreement. Much of the emphasis was put on an Indigenous anarchism as a unique radical anti-colonial tendency antagonistic towards the European orientation of the term. Observations were shared regarding how the concepts of mutual aid, non-hierarchical social relations, and direct action were already embedded in many, though not all, of our distinct Indigenous knowledge systems, and that state-based revolutionary strategies, like socialism and communism, are inherently anti-Indigenous. Though there was not a cohesive agreement, a tendency expressed was that anarchism is a tool or position with which we can use to distinguish ourselves and efforts from liberal and leftist-produced settler colonial politics (primarily reformism and Marxism and its “tangents”). Little time was wasted reacting to white anarchist identity, which was perhaps the primary reason the Anarchist People of Color (APOC) position welcoming Indigenous, Black, and Brown People was invoked.

Chris Finley shared their experiences coming to anarchism through the punk-rock scene and arriving at a place of Indigenous feminist anarchism, “...I came back to anarchy because I want to know not just what I am against, because I knew this shit was fucked up, but what I wanted to be for and who I wanted to be with in that for. That’s a difficult question, I am colonized, it’s really hard for us to think of something outside of this so we need other people and to help us through that and to imagine those things together.”

A zine titled, “*Autonomously and with Conviction: A Métis Refusal of State-Led Reconciliation*” that was distributed at the event asserted, “Anarchism is a political philosophy – some might say a beautiful idea – that believes in self-governed societies based on voluntary association with one

another. It advocates for non-hierarchical decision-making, direct participation in those decisions by affected communities, and autonomy for all living persons. Furthermore, it leaves space for the valuation of non-human entities beyond their monetary worth or usefulness to human beings. My Indigenous teachings have communicated to me that our communities are important, but so are we as individuals. Traditional ways saw decision making as a participatory process, based on consensus, where communities made choices together. My teachings tell me that the land can offer us what we need, but never to take more than that. I see these ideas as fundamentally compatible. I'd like to see an anarchy of my people and the anarchy of settlers (also my people) enacted here together, side by side. With an equal distribution of power, each pursuing healthy relationships, acting from their own ideas and history. Just as the Two Row imagined. I would like to see the centralized state of Canada dismantled. I'd like to see communities take up the responsibility of organizing themselves in the absence of said central authority."

Louise Benally spoke to her experiences resisting forced relocation on Big Mountain and calling for further action to take down all these systems that are destroying Mother Earth. Louise stated that anarchism is "about action, you believe in yourself, you believe in what you're going to speak about, you believe in what you're doing, you're not bound by a group or governmental entity, you do what you have to do. I believe in the earth and the spirits that work within the earth, that is where I first go. Working with and through nature, that is the only thing that I have faith in, I don't trust any system because it has never done anything for me. I don't practice christianity, that is not something that I understand. I don't base my ways on that, I don't believe in the US government because that is just about destruction of a culture and consumption of culture."

The panel "Locating an Indigenous Anarchism" was named after Aragorn!'s zine' that was published in 2005, from which he read a section of and provided a definition of Indigenous anarchism, "For what it is worth we will have to establish a way to live that is both indigenous, which is to say of the land that we are actually on, and anarchist, which is to say without authoritarian constraint." Aragorn! stated, "On the one hand I have a very big problem with hyphenated anarchism, when people refer to themselves as anarchist and blank, they really mean the blank and the anarchism is a secondary concern. I've always seen seen anarchism and indigeneity as being synonymous terms. For me the idea of an anarchism that isn't placed right here, never made sense. The idea of anarchism as a set of western enlightenment values that somehow we learned in school or something never made sense to me. One of the concerns I have about this weekend, is that sometimes our enthusiasm is more our concern and more the way that we communicate ourselves and our ideas than anything else, and in the case of something as important as this idea, this idea of a land based politics that is huge in size, I don't want this to turn into politics as usual. I say that knowing that that's going to be a challenge when it comes up in details."

After reading the excerpt from "Locating an Indigenous Anarchism" Aragorn! emphasized, "For me those are the only terms that matter, 'authoritarian constraint' and 'place.'"

The Against Settler Colonial Politics panel on Sunday further asserted that, "anarchism is in fact something we can define ourselves," The panel also referenced Russell Mean's statement "For America To Live Europe Must Die" as an eloquent Indigenous response to the proposition of Marxist authoritarianism. A zine titled, "Marxism and it's Tangents... for anarchists," was distributed that stated, "...because sometimes people are not really on our team." Some of the Q&A had push-back regarding a "need for leftist unity" and not to perpetuate "european-based leftist disputes," to that responses were made that we "should be honest about leftist politics, that the



conclusions of communism and socialism are anti-Indigenous.” A panelist asked the question, “are we criticizing authoritarianism or european dogma?” A sheet titled, “the Red Flags of Red Fasc(ists)” listing authoritarian leftist front groups was shared by a persxn who was at La Conxa in so-called LA when it was attacked by a Maoist group.

**On the organizing/activism/struggle front**, there were many workshops proposed about border struggles which were the primary focus of action against attacks on Indigenous lands and Peoples for the convergence. The O’odham Anti-Border Collective shared their strategies to maintain their ways of life despite ongoing occupation, borders, and barriers on their traditional homelands. On the Autonomous Organizing Against Borders panel, an organizer from so-called El Paso addressed how their community is responding to white supremacist attacks while they’re facing extreme state repression. They also shared how a radical community center was undermined by “the subtle forms of white supremacy that invade and co-opt our spaces.” They railed against “non-profit liberal power wielding mechanisms,” and asserted that, “we’re not here to ask for reform. The law is killing our people.”

Another organizer from occupied Tongva lands so-called Los Angeles discussed their work directly supporting migrant folx held in concentration camps. The organizer received a call from a trans migrant person being held in one of the concentration camps and put them on the microphone. The conversation was emotional and raw with the tension of these struggles filling every corner of the room.

On the “Solidarity Means Action, Anti-colonial-Struggle Means Attack!” panel MAMA Julz stated that, “Prayer and action go hand in hand, I’ve always stood on that. If we’re sitting there in prayers and there’s no-one out there then nothing is going to get done. Our ancestors want us to meet them half-way. No matter how scary it gets, remember that as long as we’re fighting for the people and mother earth in a good way, we’re always going to be protected. If you believe you can shut shit down, shut shit down, but pray first.”

Leona Morgan from Diné No Nukes and Haul No! spoke about fighting nuclear colonialism which has left thousands of abandoned uranium mines and spread cancer throughout Indigenous Lands. She stated that “70% of uranium comes from Indigenous lands” and that current proposals call for bringing all the nuclear waste from throughout the “US” into New Mexico effectively creating a “national sacrifice zone. They’re saying here is that nuclear power is a ‘clean’ solution to global warming while we are the ones getting cancer, were the ones that have our water, plants, and food sources contaminated.” She looked towards international anti-nuke direct action movements that are stopping uranium shipments and called for support, “We may need to do that here.”

Klee Benally from Protect the Peaks and an organizer of the convergence provided an overview of the struggle and failures to stop the desecration of the holy San Francisco Peaks, which is located just outside of Kinlani/Flagstaff. A ski resort has been allowed by the Forest Service to make fake snow out of millions of gallons of treated sewage on the mountain. Klee stated, “Settler colonial laws were never designed to benefit Indigenous peoples’ ways of life, they were designed to destroy them. To be more effective we need to be honest with ourselves and understand how Standing Rock was strategic failure in that it didn’t stop the pipeline, of course it was a social and cultural success, but we need to be critical in real-time about these struggles so we can be more effective. If we don’t talk about our failures how can we learn?”

**On Sunday evening, before everyone started sharing their contact info**, before dinner and after a lecture, we stopped and decided not to end in accordance with our traditional protocol.

**An organizer for the convergence wrote in another report back,** “Somewhere at the gathering, I expected to be in the presence of indigenous anarchism. I did not know if indigenous anarchism was the fire we would gather around, if it was the individuals converging, or if it was an empty space where individuals were to ignite the flames. It’s safe to say, my expectations were met. I witnessed an indigenous anarchism but it was unfamiliar to me, a Diné anarchist.... The potential I have discovered at the convergence is the particulars of Diné anarchy. Fires made from crystal and fires made from turquoise. Fires bright enough to find the light of other Diné anarchists in this dark world I find myself in. A world sickened from the industrialization of civilized humans whose culture of control and destruction forces all living things to adopt, adapt, or die. I suggest that Diné anarchy offers the addition of a choice to attack. An assault on our enemy that weakens their grip on, not only our glittering world, but the worlds of others. An opportunity for the anarchy of Ndee, of O’odham, and so on, to exact revenge on their colonizers. Until all that’s left for Diné anarchists is to dissuade the endorsements of the next idol expecting our obedience.”

A perfect analogy?

For the moment we see Indigenous Anarchism as a reference point, but this term is so broad that for all it could encompass it also stifles. We’re not interested in re-engineering social arrangements, we’re interested in inspired formations, agitations, interventions, and acts towards total liberation. From our perspective, at the base of Do’koo’osliid, we see more use in building contextual understandings deeply rooted in our sacred lands and teachings. This places us in some ways at odds with a flattening that the larger emergent force of Indigenous Anarchism would have. As Aragorn! stated, “Indigenous anarchism is a politics that has yet to be written and maybe that is a good thing.”

For now we will continue to agitate, organize, write, discuss, and provoke to further radical autonomous/anti-authoritarian Indigenous tendencies towards total liberation.

## Fire Walk with Me: IAC reportback 2

I answered a call to gather around a fire with Black, Indigenous, People of Color in Kinlam at Taala Hooghan Infoshop. Somewhere at the gathering, I expected to be in the presence of indigenous anarchism. I did not know if indigenous anarchism was the fire we would gather around, if it was the individuals converging, or if it was an empty space where individuals were to ignite the flames. It's safe to say, my expectations were met. I witnessed an indigenous anarchism but it was unfamiliar to me, a Dine anarchist.

Truthfully, it's inaccurate to say that the indigenous anarchism I saw was unfamiliar because that implies it possessed unidentifiable attributes.

I, very much, recognized the features of the fire and I recognized the methods to build that fire. In this case, the features were global indigenous justice and the methods were university jargon of the humanities discipline. The social movement that will be the fires of this indigenous anarchism require more and more indigenous resistance as the fuel to grow and grow the burning. What happens when we run out of fuel? Who do we reach out to for a fresh supply? I ask myself those questions knowing full well they will be answered quickly, meaning uncritically, by any individual enthusiastic with my premonition. Admittedly, the fire I had gathered around was not so much unfamiliar as it was unappealing.

This was unappealing because I also answered the call as an indigenous anarchist ["sickened by fascinations with dead white-men's thoughts (and their academies and their laws), reformist & reactionary "decolonial activisms", and the uninspired merry-go-round of leftist politics as a whole"]. However, I found that many of the people in attendance were academics, activists, de-colonizers, and leftists that were in very good health despite their proximity to these toxic superstructures. Academics vigorously drawing from their learning curated by western liberal intellectualism while being hungry for another direction with an agreeable pan-indigenous guide. Activists energetically sharing their praxis acquired from footage of Standing Rock while local indigenous struggles remained unknown. De-colonizers robustly calling out problematic land acknowledgements for not being inclusionary while missing the value of being specific to the land they're on. Then finally, leftists focusing on their vision of centralized solidarity as one voice united to change the world while the incoherence from every voice making individual demands to exhaust authority was never considered.

Yes, the indigenous anarchism I saw was kind of unfamiliar and mostly unappealing but I would not say the gathering was unsuccessful. I believe people will grow this indigenous anarchism. An ideology succinct enough for Instagram stories, 280 character limit tweets, and vibrant screen printed art, excuse me, memes. A movement global enough to essentialize a racial, humanist, and material struggle of indigeneity so others will comfortably speak for any absent voice. A resistance so monolithic the powers that be could easily identify then repress all indigenous anarchists.

For me, success would be more disagreements that are challenging and hopefully with humor. I'd rather agree or disagree with a new suggestion rather than dispute laudatory presumptions grounded in radical liberalism that has been indigenized, north american style, only for flair.

I understand an indigenous person can have a complicated personal relationship with their indigeneity and their role within the violent dominance of capitalist settler-colonial-ism. Additionally, I understand an individual's linear journey to Anarchism began somewhere and maybe they still sympathetically carry ideological mementos from their past. Facetiousness aside, I am glad people may have found potential from this gathering to develop their indigenous anarchist ideas.

The potential I have discovered at the convergence is the particulars of Dine anarchy. Fires made from crystal and fires made from turquoise. Fires bright enough to find the light of other Dine anarchists in this dark world I find myself in. A world sickened from the industrialization of civilized humans whose culture of control and destruction forces all living things to adopt, adapt, or die. I suggest that Dine anarchy offers the addition of a choice to attack. An assault on our enemy that weakens their grip on, not only our glittering world, but the worlds of others. An opportunity for the anarchy of Ndee, of O'odham, and so on, to exact revenge on their colonizers. Until all that's left for Dine anarchists is to dissuade the endorsements of the next idol expecting our obedience.

# Contrasts at the Boundary Lines: A Chat with Armando Resendez by Dominique Ganawaabi

I sat down with Armando, a visual artist from the Tijuana/San Diego area, at his studio in Oakland. We discussed art theory, cultural identity, mythology, and failure. If it feels like the middle section of a longer, deeper conversation, that's because it is.

*D: So, what have you been working on recently?*

A: I'm making these paintings influenced by modern art based on contrast. Like "a primary green with a primary red" Next to each other they don't really go along. It's very unpleasant. That's why I'm calling the series "Contrast" but, in trying to do all that, instead of doing very high contrast colors I also been using earth tones. I guess I actually do want it to be pleasant, because some of them make my eyes hurt when I look at them. Too much green, too much red. It's not complementary, but that's kind of what I was going for. So I'm compromising.

*D: Why did you originally want to do something jarring?*

A: I was reading a Wassily Kandinsky book. He was talking about how certain colors go together, certain colors clash. A yellow is very earthy and a sky blue is very heavenly. If you put them together it won't make sense.

I'm also really into Piet Mondrian. He separates colors. He separates the primaries. He did it with the white and the black bars. You see it everywhere in the commercial world and we gravitate towards that. Art critics can explain it intellectually. You see yellow, red, and blue interact on construction sites and on hazardous material symbols. So primaries are used to call people's attention. Watch out! Nowadays we see orange or green neon.

*D: That reminds me of how police and ambulances had to change their sirens because people got used to the old sound. They had to find a new way to get people's attention. Or how helvetica was a font that could be used for everything but at some point we get bored of it.*

A: There are certain designs we use over and over because it gets people's attention, or they relax people. It seems like Kandinsky figured out something theoretically that I'm really excited by. I wanted to see what happens when you put colors together that shouldn't work and I've definitely had to compromise.

I started by painting cactuses. It became more earthy, but the bright red is still there like a flag. So a cultural context comes with it. I started also thinking about cultural contrast too. I don't know if people can see the cultural contrast in the paintings. A cultural clash going on, but I have these associations with certain symbols. There are cactuses everywhere, but obviously in Mexico there are a lot.

One painting is of a Mexican pot, but another is of the Oakland Raiders stadium. I wanted to do that because I've been painting all these ancient or old mexican things or generalized mexican things, but I wanted to say that Mexicans are also into the Raiders. I wanted to show really

commercial, modern things that Mexicans are into. It's not just the old things. It's not just contrasting colors, but a cultural contrast. I have one symbol in front of me and I see what happens in me as I present it in a painting. I've always been wary of using cultural identities and culturally identifiable symbols to sell art. Not that I'm selling much art (Laughter)

*D: That's because you don't put enough Aztec calendars in there*

A: Yeah, perhaps. I've always been wary of that. I mean obviously I'm painting a Mexican pot. I'm doing it. It's almost like if you use certain symbols you should know everything about them. It feels weird to sell things that are culturally important. I'm not trying to say fuck all these people who do that, but I want to connect to everyone. I like this tension, the same as with the colors. Like with music you can find a release, you can hold in and let go of energy. Letting things go and letting them resurface. My paintings sound very intellectual when I explain all this shit, but a lot of it is just going and doing it and maybe there are some ideas after the fact.

I like approaching things on all levels. I think it's good to have theory. I think it's good not having theory. Just paint it. "I want to use this color" I want to do it all at the same time.

*D: I like the way you talk about tension. You don't just want to sell Mexican imagery. Maybe you want to connect with a broader audience but your nationality is still in there somewhere. It seems like it could get complicated.*

A: Maybe it seems like I'm trying to waterdown my nationality, so I can sell to a bigger audience? Perhaps.

*D: But the nationality is still there. You can still see the pots and cactus. Like you don't wake up and say "I'm going to eat tacos today because I'm Mexican" It's just what you do.*

A: Yeah, it's just what you gravitate towards.

*D: There is some kind of balancing happening. You could just paint totally universal art using only geometric patterns or instead only paint ethnic murals and zapatista masks. But you're doing something in between.*

A: It's individual and very personal. I want to conjure something up inside of me. I hope I can do things that distract me enough to be free enough, but also my life and the things I'm tied to still show up. Recently I was reading about Aztec art. This was an interpretation. I don't know if the source was some Spanish person. It was from a theological text, but they had this concept called "Flower and Song." They thought that the most important thing was the arts. They thought that artists were the people who would find the truth. The flower will deteriorate. People will forget the songs. But, of all the things in the world "Flower and Song" are the highest things to aspire to, because they express a universal truth. The essence would be remembered.

*D: What do you think about people who say that the Aztecs were a civilization with all the negative aspects that entails. That they subdued other indigenous groups?*

A: I'm down with that. I've always liked anti-civ ideas. I would like to know about Mexican tribal people. I definitely try to learn. At the same time, we are living in a civilization. We're a part of it. I want to respect things, but what is this thing we're living in? What is this city? I'm not afraid to take things from different places.

*D: Exactly. The Aztecs definitely had agriculture and cities but "Flower and Song" sounds like a different way of envisioning the world than how the Spanish did. What were their ultimate goals, and what did that mean for art?*

A: There's also the idea that Cortez was Quetzalcoatl and that he brought the arts, songs, and crafts to Mexico. But, that's not actually what happened. The Quetzalcoatl story, whether it's real or not, has been around for a very, very long time. Since the Olmecs were around.

I like the idea of Quetzalcoatl, or even Orpheus from the Greeks. A person or in Quetzalcoatl's case a serpent brings things to a people. I also heard he was from somewhere else, maybe further south in the Americas or he was from the east and he came to South America. I've also heard some mystical people say that he wanted to bring some sort of higher religion and created an empire and the pyramids.

Originally he said he wasn't going to make pyramids any more. Another idea was that Quetzalcoatl was a person who failed. He came and wanted to do something but it failed. I think there's a lesson about a person who has all these aspirations and came to somewhere and failed. He was also against human and animal sacrifice. Obviously even up to colonial times there was still sacrifice. To bring it down back to earth, when people come to cities. I'm not from here. A lot of us are not from here. You realize there are a lot of contradictions in yourself. You have all these aspirations. "I'm gonna be an activist," "I'm gonna be an artist." Then you go through this narrative. "This activism isn't what I thought it was." "These people aren't real." This big city thing is crazy. My identity isn't what I thought it was. Maybe before you didn't like doing the cultural stuff but then you get here and you realize you want to know about your tribe or where my mom comes from. I like people who don't have it all figured out. That can admit to being hypocritical, that they still need to work things out. It's an intimate thing. And granted I don't want people to base an identity around being hypocritical, but I like people that can be into one thing but also like something that contradicts it. I think deep down people have a lot of questions about what it means to be identified as a certain thing and ultimately they want to be free. Free to do whatever they want. That's not to say that people don't appropriate cultural identities. Certainly people do. Maybe I've never had a real teacher for that?

*D: Are you saying it's possible to appropriate your own culture?*

A: I think I am doing that. It sounds crazy. These symbols seem sacred, but at the same time..and it feels like maybe Mexico was like this before colonization...there's something about the sacred and the profane.

People were able to go along with Christian narrative while injecting indigeneity into it. Like the devil and angel battling. But there's also something about just being able to use those symbols, combining indigenous symbols with Christian symbols, smashing them together. There is a looseness in the symbolic world. I think some people take things too seriously. People have a strong reaction to seeing white people wearing certain things "That's fucked up!" I don't actually see that happen very often. I'm not talking about that exactly. I'm talking about Mexicans within their own cultures using those symbols. There is a freedom to use everything you have to try to understand what's happening. Painting a pyramid. Painting an indigenous person. It's drawing a map. That sounds legit. I know people who do that and I don't shut them down by saying "You don't know what that means"

To see more go to [armandoresendez.blogspot.com](http://armandoresendez.blogspot.com)

# Rethinking the Apocalypse: An Indigenous Anti-Futurist Manifesto

*...This is a transmission from a future that will not happen. From a people who do not exist...  
The end is near. Or has it come and gone before?*

–An ancestor Why can we imagine the ending of the world, yet not the ending of colonialism?

We live the future of a past that is not our own.

It is a history of utopian fantasies and apocalyptic idealization.

It is a pathogenic global social order of imagined futures, built upon genocide, enslavement, ecocide, and total ruination.

What conclusions are to be realized in a world constructed of bones and empty metaphors? A world of fetishized endings calculated amidst the collective fiction of virulent specters. From religious tomes to fictionalized scientific entertainment, each imagined timeline constructed so predictably; beginning, middle, and ultimately, The End.

Inevitably in this narrative there's a protagonist fighting an Enemy Other (a generic appropriation of African/Haitian spirituality, a "zombie"?), and spoiler alert: it's not you or me. So many are eagerly ready to be the lone survivors of the "zombie apocalypse." But these are interchangeable metaphors, this zombie/ Other, this apocalypse. These empty metaphors, this linearity, only exist within the language of nightmares, they are at once part of the apocalyptic imagination and impulse. This way of "living," or "culture," is one of domination that consumes all for its own benefit. It is an economic and political reordering to fit a reality resting on pillars of competition, ownership, and control in pursuit of profit and permanent exploitation. It professes "freedom" yet its foundation is set on lands stolen while its very structure is built by stolen lives.

It is this very culture that must always have an Enemy Other, to lay blame, to lay claim, to affront, enslave and murder.

A subhuman enemy that any and all forms of extreme violence are not only permitted but expected to be put upon. If it doesn't have an immediate Other, it meticulously constructs one. This Other is not made from fear but its destruction is compelled by it. This Other is constituted from apocalyptic axioms and permanent misery. This Othering, this weitko disease, is perhaps best symptomatized in its simplest stratagem, in that of our silenced remaking:

*They are dirty, They are unsuited for life, They are unable, They are incapable, They are disposable, They are non-believers, They are unworthy, They are made to benefit us, They hate our freedom, They are undocumented, They are queer, They are black, They are Indigenous, They are less than, They are against us, until finally, They are no more.*

In this constant mantra of violence reframed, it's either You or it's Them.

It is the Other who is sacrificed for an immortal and cancerous continuity. It is the Other who is poisoned, who is bombed, who is left quietly beneath the rubble.

This way of unbeing, which has infected all aspects of our lives, which is responsible for the annihilation of entire species, the toxification of oceans, air and earth, the clear-cutting and



burning of whole forests, mass incarceration, the technological possibility of world ending warfare, and raising the temperatures on a global scale, this is the deadly politics of capitalism, it's pandemic.

An ending that has come before.

The physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual invasion of our lands, bodies, and minds to settle and to exploit, is colonialism. Ships sailed on poisoned winds and bloodied tides across oceans pushed with a shallow breath and impulse to bondage, millions upon millions of lives were quietly extinguished before they could name their enemy. 1492. 1918. 2020...

Biowarfare blankets, the slaughter of our relative the buffalo, the damming of lifegiving rivers, the scorching of untarnished earth, the forced marches, the treated imprisonment, coercive education through abuse and violence.

The day to day post-war, postgenocide, trading post-colonial humiliation of our slow mass suicide on the altar of capitalism; work, income, pay rent, drink, fuck, breed, retire, die. It's on the roadside, it's on sale at Indian markets, serving drinks at the casino, restocking Bashas, it's nice Indians behind you.

These are the gifts of infesting manifest destinies, this is that futured imaginary our captors would have us perpetuate and be a part. The merciless imposition of this dead world was driven by an idealized utopia as Charnel House, it was "for our own good" an act of "civilization."

Killing the "Indian"; killing our past and with it our future. "Saving the man"; imposing another past and with it another future.

These are the apocalyptic ideals of abusers, racists and hetero-patriarchs. The doctrinal blind faith of those who can only see life through a prism, a fractured kaleidoscope of an endless and total war.

It's an apocalyptic that colonizes our imaginations and destroys our past and future simultaneously. It is a struggle to dominate human meaning and all existence.

This is the futurism of the colonizer, the capitalist. It is at once every future ever stolen by the plunderer, the warmonger and the rapist.

This has always been about existence and non-existence. It is apocalypse, actualized. And with the only certainty being a deathly end, colonialism is a plague.

Our ancestors understood that this way of being could not be reasoned or negotiated with. That it could not be mitigated or redeemed. They understood that the apocalyptic only exists in absolutes.

Our ancestors dreamt against the end of the world.

Many worlds have gone before this one. Our traditional histories are tightly woven with the fabric of the birthing and ending of worlds. Through these cataclysms we have gained many lessons that have shaped who we are and how we are to be with one another. Our ways of being are informed through finding harmony through and from the destruction of worlds. The Elliptic. Birth. Death. Rebirth.

We have an unknowing of histories upon histories of the world that is part of us. It is the language of the cosmos, it speaks in prophecies long carved in the scars where our ancestors dreamed. It is the ghost-dance, the seven fires, the birth of the White Buffalo, the seventh generation, it is the five suns, it is written in stone near Oraibi, and beyond. These prophecies are not just predictive, they have also been diagnostic and instructive.

We are the dreamers dreamt by our ancestors. We have traversed all time between the breaths of our dreams. We exist at once with our ancestors and unbirthing generations. Our future is held

in our hands. It is our mutuality and interdependence. It is our relative. It is in the creases of our memories, folded gently by our ancestors. It is our collective Dreamtime, and it is Now. Then. Tomorrow. Yesterday.

The anti-colonial imagination isn't a subjective reaction to colonial futurisms, it is anti-settler future. Our life cycles are not linear, our future exists without time. It is a dream, uncolonized.

This is the Indigenous anti-future.

We are not concerned with how our enemies name their dead world or how they recognize or acknowledge us or these lands. We are not concerned with re-working their ways of managing control or honoring their dead agreements or treaties. They will not be compelled to end the destruction that their world is predicated upon. We do not plead with them to end global warming, as it is the conclusion of their apocalyptic imperative and their life is built upon the death of Mother Earth. We bury the right wing and the left wing together in the earth they are so hungry to consume. The conclusion of the ideological war of colonial politics is that Indigenous Peoples always lose, unless we lose ourselves. Capitalists and colonizers will not lead us out of their dead futures.

Apocalyptic idealization is a self fulfilling prophecy. It is the linear world ending from within. Apocalyptic logic exists within a spiritual, mental, and emotional dead zone that also cannibalizes itself. It is the dead risen to consume all life.

Our world lives when their world ceases to exist.

As Indigenous anti-futurists, we are the consequence of the history of the colonizer's future. We are the consequence of their war against Mother Earth. We will not allow the specter of the colonizer, the ghosts of the past to haunt the ruins of this world. We are the actualization of our prophecies.

This is the re-emergence of the world of cycles.

This is our ceremony.

Between silent skies. The world breathes again and the fever subsides.

The land is quiet. Waiting for us to listen.

When there are less distractions, we go to the place where our ancestors emerged.

And their/our voice.

There is a song older than worlds here, it heals deeper than the colonizer's blade could ever cut.

And there, our voice. We were always healers. This is the first medicine.

Colonialism is a plague, capitalism is pandemic.

These systems are anti-life, they will not be compelled to cure themselves.

We will not allow these corrupted sickened systems to recuperate. We will spread.

We are the antibodies.

+ + + +

Addendum: In our past/your future it was the unsystematic non-linear attacks on vulnerable critical infrastructure such as gas utilities, transportation corridors, power supplies, communications systems, and more, that made settler colonialism an impossibility on these lands.

Our organizing was cellular, it required no formal movements. Ceremony was/is our liberation, our liberation was/is ceremony.

We honored our sacred teachings, our ancestors and coming generations. We took credit for nothing.

We issued no communiques. Our actions were our propaganda.

We celebrated the death of leftist solidarity and it's myopic apocalyptic romanticism.  
We demanded nothing from capitalists/colonizers.

## The Anpoa Duta Collective Part 2: a conversation with Aragorn!

A!: So you passed through punk and punk-influenced anarchism. You mentioned that town, Winona. There was a scene there?

ADC2: There was, yea. I'm trying to think. Part of it was having a real dedication to being in Minnesota.

A!: You knew that from day one?

ADC2: Yea.

A!: You never wanted to move to a "cooler city"?

ADC2: Not really. I always talk about it this way: punk got me to anarchism, anarchism got me out of punk. I came into it as an idealistic thing and Minneapolis was a haven for punk rock, and by the time I was getting into it, it was already a has-been thing...

A!: Totally. I never liked Minneapolis punk.

ADC2: It was just one of those things—home town pride or whatnot. And I was seeing shows when I was even younger than that, with the friend group I was hanging out with. I got to see some Minneapolis legends. I'm sure some would be like, "who the fuck's that band," but... local legends. Those were very pivotal moments for me. It's also one of those things—playing in bands, being under 18, being under parents' watchful eyes, we didn't have a very large radius either. It was Minneapolis, and we went on a summer tour.

A!: It's far to go anywhere from here.

ADC2: Right. So we would play shows in really small towns. We played a lot of shows in small town suburban scenes when I was 16. So part of it was reading the CrimethInc stuff early on, it had an influence as far as the aesthetics went, especially *Days of War, Nights of Love*, it had this aesthetic of punk, but had this thing going on that I was really getting into it for, while everyone I was around was drinking and partying, even though the songs were really political and resonated with me, that was all that was there—all we were doing was going to shows on weekends, drinking, and partying. That wasn't what I wanted.

ADC1: For me, my family had always been very politically active in the native activist scene.

A!: In Minneapolis?

ADC1: In Minnesota. My mother moved down, and got a job at ASU in Arizona—she's also a native aca- demic—when I was 10. So that's where I spent most of my teen years, in Arizona.

A!: Are your parents together?

ADC1: My parents are together, but it's my grandfather who's... I'm generation three of... I rebel against the idea of the native academic, but I suppose... So she was there. It's really bizarre, I never actually read Franz Fanon, or Albert Memmi, I didn't ever read them because they were talked about all the time, they were the dinner table conversations that I grew up with...

A!: oh my god... [laughs]

ADC1: So, yea [sighs] I have these ideas that I can vaguely reference to so and so, but it didn't really matter, they were just the household names that I knew.

So when we moved back here and I got involved in protesting the Minnesota sesquicentennial celebrations that were happening in 2008, and that's when [ADC2] and I met. I was going to college that year, and had some very minimal exposure to some anarchist theory, and thought "oh, this is kind of cool," and started hanging out with you [ADC2] in the different scenes, and I found it really fascinating but I was also disillusioned very quickly. It was cool that people were centered around these politics, but in a lot of ways those politics took a back seat, sometimes, to a lot of interpersonal drama. And in many cases the politics were not thoroughly thought out. The levels of cultural appropriation were obnoxiously high.

ADC2: Especially at that time. It was nauseating and I didn't want to be involved with that.

A!: What's crazy is that, in hindsight, that was the peak of this midwestern thing.

ADC2: Right. Right. In 2008, 2009. And one of the things that began to really bother me was lack of accountability to place: this idea of moving to a cooler city. In dealing with native issues and with cultural appropriation... we worked with a couple of people really hard core, we became good friends with them, brought out all of these ideas, spent months working and cultivating these kinds of ideas, and they move off to cooler cities. For me at least, I was not getting much in terms of the investment that I was willing to put into that community.

Part of it too, there's the idea of anarchism and anarchy, and being an anarchist. It's a scene, right? If you're not showing up, if you're not a presence, then you're not really part of it anymore. I feel like there's also tons of people who resonate with the ideas, but they either don't have an access point or they're not invested in what's primarily a youth culture. My point of checking out was when we started investing energy out here. I was spending all my time up here, and we decided this is where we're going to build roots.

A!: I'm going to interrogate you on that in a second. But first, I always talk about the big problem that I see is that people conflate the social aspects of anarchism with the political aspects. Basically you're coming of age with a group of friends who... you've never known something as awesome and great as this group of friends, and when that social fabric starts to fray for a lot of people—all too many people—the political fabric also frays because of the total conflation. But since we were talking about the fact that you have some reknown, [laughter] that's because you were about to be a prisoner.

ADC2: yea.

A!: and you spent some time inside. ADC2: yea.

A!: Was it county, mostly?

ADC2: No, it was federal.

A!: You spent time in federal prison: holy shit!

ADC2: yep.

A!: So talk a little bit about that, especially in the context of this leaving...

ADC2: Yea. So, we started doing more work out here in like 2008. I got charged in 2009.

A!: And you were charged with...

ADC2: Animal Enterprise Terrorism

A!: Right, so you were one of the first people to be charged under that new AETA [Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act]...

ADC2: Well, they charged me originally under the AETA, but the crime that happened was before the AETA, so they had to revise it back to the AEPA [Animal Enterprise Protection Act]. At first I was facing, I think 20 years or something.

A!: This was for something in Iowa, if I recall... Why do I remember all this?! That's ridiculous.

ADC2: Yea. It was a conspiracy charge.

ADC1: A one-man conspiracy.

ADC2: Yea, it was like one of those vague indictments.

A!: You got held over for trial? Is that why you were in the fed?

ADC2: Well I was in county for two, two and a half, weeks, and then I got out on bond, because I had no record and didn't... I don't know, they couldn't make a compelling reason to keep me, I guess. And that was with a public defender, which is really surprising. He said it was the first time he ever got someone out of county...

A!: [laughing] Oh my god.

ADC2: Yea, a federal prisoner... so he took me out to eat that night because it was the first time it ever happened. So then it was about a year and a half of trying to figure out what their case was going to be. It gets kind of murky. A couple days before trial...

A!: I assume they were trying to toss you plea agreements...

ADC2: Yea, before that they were trying to toss me plea agreements. And we made it known that I wasn't interested.

A!: Isn't it like 95% of people plea nowadays for a federal case?

ADC2: For federal cases, yea. And to be clear I did end up pleaing, but it was a non-cooperation plea. But it was interesting, when I first got taken in, it was for contempt of court. So I wasn't even charged for a crime, they just thought I knew something about something. Then they used the contempt of court as evidence that I was part of a conspiracy. So that's the goofiest thing. That was the evidence that they used to link me... When they brought me in they had said that they're interested in someone else, and they wanted me to say that this is the person who did this... "that's all we need you to do." And this was before they charged me, so this was when I just had the contempt of court. They were like "you'll get out the next day, all you gotta do is just say this person's name." And I was like, "I don't know what you're talking about." I had no idea, and... so it was kind of funny. They were under the impression that I knew someone and... anyways. So... contempt of court, then they use that for conspiracy for AETA. They had charged me after the statute of limitation was up for that crime, because the thing in Iowa happened in November or something like that. It was over the statute of limitations by...

ADC1: Only a couple days...

ADC2: Only a couple days, but it was past it. So then they expanded the conspiracy to "unknown date," so it wasn't just the one act, it was an on-going conspiracy. They linked it to another...

ADC1: It was a mink farm.

ADC2: Yea, it was another ... they just said there is this broad conspiracy that did this thing in Iowa, and did this other thing in Minnesota. That put it back within the statute of limitations. It was actually a blessing in disguise, because the thing in Iowa would've been a much bigger deal, the thing in Minnes—when we sat down with the legal team—they were like, "if it were only this thing it would just be a misdemeanor, so you might only get probation."

So they kept on throwing plea deals, it was only a couple of them at that time, but the lawyers were like, "we're not interested, we're going to trial. Stop giving plea deals."

Then something really wonky happened. There was another person who was jailed for contempt of court, and was later released...

A!: That was Carrie.

ADC2: Yea. And they basically subpoenaed her to testify, and they subpoenaed another woman to testify. They both made it known that they weren't going to testify at the trial. So if we went to trial they would both have been in contempt of court. For Carrie the lawyers sat down and were like, "she's already been in for civil contempt, if this happens it will probably be criminal contempt, and this is what she could face..." So we just did the math at that point. We added up if she could do a year, this other person could do six to eight months, or I could do a plea, and maybe do a max of six months. That's a really simple equation from my perspective, just very utilitarian. My lawyer kind of laughed at it. He was like, "They're never gonna let you go for six months. They're never... like, the max punishment for that would be six months, it's a misdemeanor, they're not gonna let that happen." I was like "well, worst thing you can do is throw it out there, if they really don't want to go to trial... I'm not gonna go down for a felony..."

A!: Your life changes if you...

ADC2: Yea, I didn't want that to happen. And also the big fight was about Iowa, and there were a lot of things about that. It was the original case, I'm just, I'm not gonna go down for that. Anyways, the lawyers pitched it to them for the Minnesota thing, and as a misdemeanor. And that's what I pled to, a federal misdemeanor, and did six months.

It happens to people who go to School of the Americas protests. Those're the only other people who I know of who are charged with federal misdemeanors. It was a really surreal experience, going into federal prison...

A!: Did you do two and a half months?

ADC2: No I spent the full six months.

A!: They made you do the full six? Bastards. [laughs]

ADC2: I wasn't there long enough to qualify for early release. Yea, got really into weight lifting and got to hang out with tons of people and...

ADC1: It makes me feel better about the world that the prosecutor of his case basically lost his job over this...

ADC2: Well he didn't lose his job, he got...

ADC1: He got demoted, he's no longer allowed to have his offices in the main...

ADC2: I don't know if he's "no longer allowed" but we heard that his office moved...

ADC1: They moved his office...

ADC2: It sounds like it was a personal thing, like make or break, and it didn't happen, so...

A!: How did you change through this process? What were you... When you walked out of federal prison, were you like... were you different?

ADC2: Yea, I was ripped.

ADC1: [laughter]

ADC2: . like I said, I was weightlifting a bunch.

I don't know. I feel like I kind of had set myself up to just get through it. I had this mentality that there's not that many people who have faced federal charges who can get out. I just determined, worst case scenario, this is going to happen...

A!: Were you raised to the level of "Star of the animal rights community"?

ADC2: No, I don't think so.

ADC1: Not actually. That got to be very contentious about who was doing prisoner support for him.

A!: They treat their prisoners pretty well.

ADC1: They do.

ADC2: Yea. There were people who wrote to me, but I wasn't an animal rights activist at that point.

A!: Had you been in the past?

ADC2: Yea, I was in the anarchist scene. I was vegetarian, I did a ton of prisoner support for ALF and ELF prisoners. That's mostly what my activism had revolved around, was prisoner support. So I knew some of the realities of prison. And I think there was some pressure to play up the star role more, but it wasn't...

A!: It wasn't you.

ADC2: Well, like, I was a hunter, at the time I was hunting...

ADC1: That actually came up a couple times during...

ADC2: ...about whether people should support me because I hunt.

ADC1: I got really irritated at one prominent member of the animal rights anarchist group who was saying that ADC2 was a Dakota primitivist who hunts animals. He's not "an ALF prisoner." It was like, he's not going to support you as such because of that.

ADC2: And that's fine. People come at it from where they're at.

A!: That's what I was asking...

ADC2: I don't take it personally either.

ADC1: I do. [laughter]

ADC2: There's no reason to. It's not worth it.

ADC1: I know.

ADC2: That status is glorified, and... prison is shitty. I went into it with, this is an experience that is supposed to be miserable. They're trying to punish you. They're trying to drain whatever out of you. For me, I went into it with "I'm going to get the most out of this experience that I can." I didn't really have a choice, especially with the plea, so... and then also it was very short term. Six months... I would've probably had a very different perspective if I were facing 20 years. That's a much bigger bullet to bite. Six months is almost literally nothing. I've wasted six months doing stupider shit.

A!: Absolutely.

ADC2: And there was some pressure to write communiques out of prison, or messages...

ADC1: You did one communique where you had gotten to 100 pushups... [laughs]

ADC2: I was in solitary for a while 'cause I was in private prison. So I had no contact; for a while I wasn't getting letters, I didn't have phone calls. So all I could do was...

A!: ...push ups.

ADC2: Yea. So there was some pressure to do that but to put stuff out, or to make it... but it's like—six months. People...

A!: Right. When you compare yourself to McGowen, or to that poor kid in Sacramento...

ADC2: Right. Those are people who... there's a status... I do think that people who go to prison should be celebrated for political acts. And whether celebrity is the right term or not...

A!: Whatever it takes for them to get support...

ADC2: Yea, for me it was more of this notion that... I didn't really feel like I deserved that or wanted it. For me I went into it with... I hate to use the word zen, but... I'm going to do it day by



day, and make the most of this experience. And in some ways it's easier doing that. It's easier to just do your time.

A!: I've had a lot of serious medical stuff in my life, and it's a similar sort of thing, if I don't get this taken care of, I die, so I'm just going to let go...

ADC2: Yea.

A!: My agency is no longer the issue, I am going under the knife right now.

ADC2: Right. You let it happen.

I feel like, coming out of it, it was kind of doing... I don't know if soul searching is the right term. I'd sundanced before that, so I'd gone through some harder things than prison, let's just put it that way, things that were more physically taxing.

So for six months I spent a lot of time reading, a lot of time thinking, a fair amount of time writing, and coming out of it I had this clear idea of where I wanted to end up. And also a better sense of who's in my corner, politics aside. That's what came out of it in some way. There were some people, and I think it's important to have political ties, but I definitely came out really appreciative of the people who supported me, the people who had my back, and really appreciative of the people who wrote to me. But coming out I had a clear sense of where I wanted to throw my energy, and my weight. Realizing the kind of patience it was going to take. It's gonna take time. And building a resilient community is going to take generations, you know what I mean?

A!: Sure!

ADC2: So I guess the stuff I came to was not really as a result of prison, but from having the time to sit back and reflect. And it wasn't so much that I was deciding to check out of anarchism, but just where should I put my energy, coming from where I come from. The scene in Minneapolis... there were good friendships, good community, but I was just realizing more and more that I wasn't fitting there, it just wasn't where my life was heading long term.

That's where I think, for us, the whole prison thing really solidified our relationship, too.

A!: Yea, I was going to ask you that too. How did you [ADC1] change through this? Sounds like you were not as patient. [laughter]

ADC1: Part of that's just my character, I'm not as forgiving of things in general.

A!: It is part of the role of being a partner.

ADC1: Exactly.

A!: One person can act all like...

ADC1: ..."Oh, it's fine..." No it's not!

I don't know. I don't feel like I changed a whole lot. It was this interesting thing. We've had two major separations in our relationship, one was when he went to prison, and the other was when I went to El Paso for a year so I could do my midwifery training. So, similarly to my time away, it was an opportunity for me to live by myself for the first time, because I moved from home, went to college, he and I met and moved in together. So it was an opportunity to do that and be more independent, figure that out: who I was apart from other people. And through that became clear that no, this is the person I want to be with, and the situation in which I want to be, and come hell or high water, that's what I'm going to put my energy towards. And a huge part of our relationship—in the broader sense of the word—has really been wrapped up in and focused on the idea of radical indigeneity, from specifically a radical, nationalist, Dakota idea. Having this place of primacy both in our lives individually but also together. It's a focus that both of us have decided to throw what weight and energy we have, behind.

# Anti-Colonial Hxstory: Colonization is a plague

BEFORE COLONIZERS, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES HAD NEVER EXPERIENCED SMALL-POX, MEASLES OR FLU. THE VIRUSES TORE THROUGH TURTLE ISLAND, KILLING AN ESTIMATED NINETY PERCENT OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES.

In 1763, during an ongoing siege on the colonial military outpost called “Fort Pitt” led by Obwandiyag (Odawa Nation, aka Pontiac), British invaders used smallpox infected blankets as a biological weapon. The British general Jeffrey Amherst had written, *“Could it not be contrived to send the smallpox among those disaffected Tribes of Indians? We must, on this occasion, use every stratagem in our power to reduce them.”*

# Ongoing Colonization Continues to Desecrate Occupied Hia Ced O'odham Jewed by Sapé!

As we look to each other during a time of concern for the health and well being of our families, capitalist interests continue to reap destruction upon sacred land in the form of border imperialism. In the midst of the Covid19 crisis, the interim government is doubling down on desecration of sacred sites on unceded and occupied Hia Ced O'odham territory, otherwise known as Organ Pipe National Monument, Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge, and the Barry Goldwater Bombing Range. Earlier this year, explosions blasted through Monument Hill, in an area set aside as a formal 'enforcement zone,' designated by the Roosevelt Easement in a 1907 presidential proclamation. Before that time, the land was free and known as Hia Ced O'odham territory, going back to the times of our creation stories.

As Caterpillar bulldozers plunge through O'odham ancestral cemeteries, homelands, and prayer grounds, our families mourn. After the sugai bushes, palo verde trees, sacred Has:an (Saguaro) and other life is carelessly tossed aside for a 60 foot road, Southwest Valley Constructors, an entity of Kiewit, continues to erect miles of 30 ft steel bollard-style walls. In the near future, these steel barriers are to be completed with stadium flood lights, blotting out the magnificent views of the stars seen since the times of our ancestors, drastically changing the landscape. Well drilling companies pump from our sacred natural springs at record speeds, disregarding the sanctity of the area, the scarcity of water, and all life in the process. In an ecosystem where water is a scarce resource for plants, animals, and humans—much of our ecosystem is taken for granted. The water is then sprayed copiously over just flattened dirt roads. A generous amount of the desert water supply is also used to mix the concrete which is then poured deep into the jeved, to stabilize the steel wall.

Man camps have been established in Ajo, AZ, with regular unwanted interactions with community members concerned over this infiltration. The construction has doubled down during stay at home pandemic orders. Ajo Community Members and Tohono O'odham villagers are awoken by the sounds of semi-trucks carrying large panels heading south towards the border. Neighboring communities, Sonoyta, Ajo, and Gu Vo and Hickiwan districts of the Tohono O'odham reservation, have regular interactions and experiences with construction crews. Wall construction continues on unceded territory where Hia Ced O'odham were once forcibly removed—making way for mining, bombing range activities, and recreational enjoyment for settler tourists.

Meanwhile, on the Tohono O'odham reservation, contractors come through by the truckload, carrying large cylindrical shaped equipment. The Integrated Fixed Towers, also known as IFTs, are a project of the Israeli tech company, Elbit Systems, which has a subsidiary in the United States. Prior to deals made between the United States and Israel, the IFTs have been "tested" on occupied Palestinian communities in the West Bank, Gaza, and other areas of occupied Palestine.

Although many O’odham fiercely oppose these towers and their locations so near to communities, the Department of Homeland Security and elected officials of the Tohono O’odham Nation heartbreakingly agreed to this continued occupation of border patrol on O’odham lands.

Walls, towers, bombs, checkpoints, old mines, assimilationist policy, and revisionist history have all served in the interest of the settler colonial state. These entities are not new, but the rate in which they are desecrating our ancestral homeland, waiving their own settler imposed laws, is unprecedented. These occupying entities must be stopped, as well as the ongoing efforts to pacify our people through these mechanisms.

## **Liberation Through Dismantling Borders and Barriers**

Dismantling borders and barriers is the first step in repairing divides between O’odham. Colonial forces often use divide and conquer strategies to sever connections existing among O’odham since the beginning of our creation stories. This persistent attempt at our erasure has caused much harm to our peoples, who continue to live along the United States and Mexico borderlands. Indigenous peoples are not conquered. Our existence in the face of attempts to extinguish our culture defies colonial declaration of conquest. Academics, serving the interests of settler colonists, went so far as to declare Hia Ced O’odham extinct, whitewashing much of our histories to fit a non-indigenous narrative. Hia Ced O’odham, Tohono O’odham, and Akim el O’odham still exist, with O’odham in Mexico and O’odham in the so called United States having roots and relations in all the areas of the jeved. The O’odham Anti Border Collective looks to uplift the voices of O’odham water, land, and culture protectors throughout Turtle Island and connect our collective efforts.

O’odham traditional homelands expand all the way North to the Gila and Salt Rivers, East to Yuma, South to Caborca and the Gulf of Mexico, and West to the San Pedro River. As O’odham, we face numerous issues in each of our distinct communities.

Each community is impacted by Spanish and U.S settler colonialism in different ways. In our territory, colonization presents itself through many forms—extraction projects, mines, dams, corporate agriculture, deforestation, a massive border wall, deportation, incarceration, surveillance towers, bombing ranges, military occupation, a freeway desecrating mountains to pave way for industry, residential school survivors, sex and gender violence, missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, state brutality, food deserts, environmental racism that wastelands our homes, lack of healthcare, record diabetes rates, trauma, addiction, broken families, gangs, gun violence, internalized oppression of sexism, racism, homophobia, and through an array of other harms that aren’t our way. In recognizing harms done to us and our community and naming them, we empower ourselves to break cycles rooted in colonial greed and oppression. By strengthening community bonds and reconnecting with himdag, we find ways to regenerate our cultures and community bonds. In this process, artificial borders and barriers become as meaningless as the colonial concepts that they hailed from.

## **The O’odham Anti-Border Collective**

A history of colonial borders and barriers have severed relations between our people and himdag (way of life). We examine this history, looking to keep our roots intact as we repair

ourselves. We are a strong people with the ability to reconnect and heal the wounds caused by barriers, separation, and assimilation processes. We take collective and individual action for the decolonization of O'odham jewed (homelands), the revitalization of O'odham himdag, and the resurgence of O'odham people.

Prior to the colonial border, O'odham were connected through ceremony, trade, language, shared culture and identity, and social relationships despite geographic divisions and regional uniqueness. We considered ourselves relatives and recognized each other collectively as O'odham, demarcated only by region and dialect. O'odham peoples comprise some of the largest Indigenous communities in the U.S. today and historically have included several regions with slight differences in O'odham language dialect, geographic area, and small cultural nuances that distinguish one community from another, even though we are all collectively O'odham. We call ourselves Onk Akimel O'odham (Salt River people), Keli Akimel O'odham (Gila River people), Tohono O'odham (desert people), Hia Ced O'odham (sand people). O'odham in Mexico, also known as OIM, represent areas south of the imposed borderlands. There are also communities of O'odham descendants and tribal members in cities like Yuma, Arizona and Los Angeles, California who have lived there for generations. We are all descended from O'odham Huhugam, or ancestors. Our traditional clan systems are inclusive of mixed O'odham identities and we embrace the diversity of our people who are also of mixed heritage and other cultures. We reclaim the sacredness of our two spirit and LGBTQI O'odham who traditionally had important and honored roles in our culture and communities.

From the onset of colonization, religious barriers separated O'odham according to belief systems imposed by colonizers, and traditional ways of life were not allowed by missionaries unless they conformed to Spanish Catholic indoctrination. This indoctrination would later take the form of Mormon, Presbyterian, and other Christian beliefs brought by U.S. invaders. While some O'odham peoples converted to new religions, Indigenized these practices, and adapted to the imposition of colonial cultures in order to survive, other O'odham continued to resist colonization and assimilation in other ways. O'odham actively resisted through the overthrow of missions, escape and rebellion from enslavement (often in mines and plantations), and through exercising the autonomy to engage in colonial commerce on their own terms, often through taking advantage of traveling colonizers in need of food, guides, and supplies. We as O'odham continue to practice ceremonies that transgress the border, from the sacred salt journeys, running for prayer, or annual pilgrimage to Magdalena, Sonora.

At frequent times throughout history, O'odham resisted colonial occupation and encroachment through violent and bloody wars. War was seen as something to be avoided, but was fought to win when it came to protecting the land and people from those who wished to cause harm. Because our ancestors defended the jewed, we were able to retain existing territory where many O'odham now remain. Encroachment has been ongoing ever since. Colonizers, through the use of agents, informants, and anthropologists, studied O'odham and would report back on strategies to divide and conquer. Government forces would then instigate established tensions between neighboring indigenous bands of Apache and Quechan. This unfortunately led to conflict, disconnects we look to repair and move beyond as we remove barriers and fight the same battles to protect the earth.

The majority of O'odham jewed was unceded territory until recent times. After Mexico established independence from Spain in 1821, Spanish colonial recognition policy deemed O'odham lands as part of this newly established country. However, O'odham communities retained tradi-

tional leadership and autonomy. In 1854, the Gadsden Purchase created the current border, at a time when rebellions against missionaries, plantations, mineral, animal, wood, water extraction, and settlers were frequent. This border, an imaginary line at the time, was the beginning of a major separation of Hia Ced O'odham (sand people), Akimel O'odham (river people), and Tohono O'odham (desert people). The creation of this colonial partition commenced further separations through colonization, militarization, assimilation under two competing colonial regimes, and territorial acquisition.

Today, O'odham in Mexico still fight for recognition of traditional governments and ejidos on the territories they reside. O'odham in Mexico's territory is at risk of government encroachment in addition to land grabs and violence from Mexican ranchers, agricultural interests, tourism companies, mines, factories, non-Indigenous urban sprawl, and cartels. Much work has been done to preserve historical and sacred sites such as salt deposits, the Pinacates, the lake at Quitovac, and other sacred areas threatened by economic growth and encroachment from those who seek to extract our resources and destroy our lands, communities, religion, history, and culture. Many O'odham in Mexico seek to retain their own sovereignty through the practice of traditional autonomy. O'odham on both sides look to deconstruct the border in order to connect with each other through maintaining language, family ties, and cultural revitalization.

In the so called United States, many O'odham still live in territories claimed by the park service or colonial cities and towns. We consider these lands to be unceded territory, as these lands were not taken with the consent of O'odham. We look to recognize all O'odham traditional homelands and reclaim their significance, despite intentional erasure.

When we connect despite the barriers between us, our bonds as indigenous caretakers of the land become stronger. Our trade routes re-emerge as pathways to reconnecting relationships and practices of autonomy. When we practice our himdag and deepen our relationships to the land and to each other, it becomes possible to conceptualize a non-capitalist, non-consumptionist way of existence. There is power in collective resistance to assimilative policies of destruction and extraction. Our grandparents remember the time when the lands were unrestricted to travel. Our ancestors remember a time when our land and people were free. Our collective aims to be conceptually and materially free from colonial barriers, refusing the boundaries of the oppressor.

## **Recognition Strategy**

The O'odham Anti Border Collective does not look to colonial government structures for leadership or recognition. We reject colonial strategies that seek our extinction. We welcome O'odham descendants to reconnect with their extended families and communities of origin. We welcome O'odham who have been disconnected from the culture or the community to learn, make connections, and heal. We hold the power as sovereign people to recognize ourselves and fellow Indigenous nations beyond the colonizer's scope of recognition. We acknowledge O'odham as the original caretakers of the land, protecting our people and traditional territory. We look to educate ourselves and our communities, so that we may respond to assaults on the land and our people as one.

Prior to colonization, indigenous communities had their own methods of dealing with domestic abusers, sexual predators, internal conflicts, violence, and bad behaviors. Borders brought the so called drug war, and along with that, various substance abuse issues that had a rippling effect of

violence. O’odham are not alone among indigenous people targeted and killed by authorities at disproportionate rates. Newly formed police task forces regularly beat O’odham at their leisure, building a systemic cycle of distrust from an early onset. In both Mexico and the U.S., O’odham were enslaved, incarcerated, exploited, starved, and conscripted. We suffer generations of historical trauma from the violence of colonial regimes, the state, and colonial institutions on both sides of the border.

Too many have died through means of police brutality. Too many have been incarcerated. Too many have been sexually assaulted and abused and not helped by the supposed forces that claim to protect us. Our collective looks to build autonomy without the structural barrier of police, border patrol, ICE, or any entity of the prison industrial complex. We refuse the logic of disposability that the colonizer has brought through mass incarceration, deportation, and detention. As we envision society without borders and barriers, we envision communities without the rule of an outside central authority. We envision a future where once again O’odham have dignity, traditional virtues, and revolutionary spirit to resolve our own conflicts and guide our communities and families in a good way, decolonizing from lateral violence and oppression.

We seek to honor our lineages without reproducing sexism, homophobia, transphobia, or toxic masculinity. We seek to regenerate our traditional gender roles to become more equitable and to restore the sacred honor of our two-spirit siblings. We will not tolerate gender violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault, intimate or domestic violence, or any kind of toxicity that damages our dignity as O’odham people.

## **Where Militarization and Freeways Intersect**

On O’odham land, we face the ongoing encroachment of the companies invested in exploiting and militarizing O’odham land and indigenous peoples all over the world. Elbit, Cemex, Raytheon, G4S, Corecivic, Tucson tech park, Barry Goldwater Bombing Range, Davis Monthan Air Force Base, Freeport McMoran, and other industries all have established bases on O’odham traditional territory. How did such encroachment take place? Colonial entities have many motives for displacing O’odham. The more we study the land, the more we realize that our issues intersect. Much of these issues are tied to greed and exploitation of resources.

The settler colonial destruction of land in the north of O’odham territory is evident in the large settler growth in cities such as Phoenix, which is Akimel O’odham territory. In a place where stars can no longer be seen in the night sky, and the sacred mountains are re-named by settlers, though we uplift the original meaning and significance these mountains carry for Akimel O’odham. O’odham connection to the land is present every time Target or another strip mall comes across more bones of our ancestors.

The latest desecration of sacred mountains came in the form of freeway expansion. Colonizers seek to restrict the movement of people, including O’odham, on our homelands but have no qualms destroying land to move products, natural resources, and capital. Members of Keli Akimel O’odham, the Gila River Indian community fought to protect sacred Moadag Doak (south mountain) from the expansion of the 202 freeway. The Canamex Sun corridor connects a NAFTA trade route from Canada all the way through Mexico. Because the United States has an interest in protecting these trade routes, it seeks to militarize the border and all ports of entry to secure its

ability to extract and move goods and commerce. Meanwhile, O'odham mourn the destruction caused to the lands in the name of greed and imperialism.

In an effort to make way for the mining industry, anthropologists falsely claimed Hia Ced O'odham were extinct. Because Hia Ced O'odham were more likely to resist colonial interference, the government used a strategy of disappearance. After decades of fighting for recognition, Hia Ced were temporarily recognized as a district within the Tohono O'odham Nation. Such recognition was short lived, as tribal politics influenced by federal interference set to dismantle Hia Ced existence yet again.

Nowadays, Hia Ced O'odham land is divided into various entities claimed by the government and national agencies. Hia Ced O'odham currently face the desecration of Trump's border wall plowing through desert spaces, threatening sacred water sources, and creating havoc to the natural indigneous environment. Al Wappia, or Quitobaquito, is one of our sacred springs threatened because the Trump administration is waiving environmental laws, bulldozing the wilderness, and creating wells to mix the concrete for the steel 30 foot barriers with stadium style spotlights, frightening endangered animals away from the only regional water source in an intensely hot desert, and blinding views of the stars.

Hia Ced O'odham and Akimel O'odham territory has been flooded, displaced, and is now divided by the Barry Goldwater Bombing range testing it's munitions for global wars abroad. Traditionally, O'odham young men would journey through this area en route to sacred salt deposits near the Gulf of Mexico. This route connected our peoples across O'odham jewed, and connected us to Indigenous communities from as far south as Honduras and as far north as Canada. However, the area is now used as part of deadly Prevention Through Deterrence strategy to deter undocumented peoples fleeing imperialist wars abroad from entering the country.

As O'odham we have thousands of years of history in relationship to Indigenous peoples of the south who are now forced to flee their homelands, largely due to U.S. policy and intervention. The majority of undocumented peoples coming through O'odham territory are indigenous and our relatives. The U.S. has barely over 150 years of colonial occupancy on our lands and has no legitimacy to restrict who travels on O'odham land. O'odham should be able to decide that. Further, our himdag teaches us to welcome and care for those in need. Colonial entities have no business criminalizing human beings and people who give water in an area where such water is scarce.

## **Being Anti-Border is Being for Indigenous Land and Life**

We are committed to protecting land and life of O'odham and our jewed. Like our huhugam we are warriors protecting the sacred. We do this work in prayer, in ceremony, in healing, and in regeneration of our sovereignty and autonomy as Indigenous peoples. We practice our himdag when we protect the water like the spring in Al Wappia, or Quitobaquito, from racist border walls. We practice our himdag when we protect our sacred mountains like Moadak Doag from capitalist freeways. We practice our himdag when we refuse to participate in racism, sexism, or homophobia. We practice our himdag when we leave food and water for migrants in the jewed. We practice our himdag when we protect women and two spirit people from violence. We practice our himdag when we protect our jewed from destruction for profit. We practice our himdag when we heal our bodies from addiction and the effects of poor western diets. We practice



our himdag when we learn our language and when we cross the colonial border to meet other O'odham for ceremony. We practice our himdag when we learn our history and reject colonial occupation, by the U.S. or Mexico. We practice our himdag when we care for our elders and our children, and heal our families from historical trauma. We practice our himdag when we refuse barriers, separations, extractions, and brutality by reaching out to create connections, protect the sacred, and regenerate life. We are O'odham against borders. We are O'odham for autonomy and sovereignty. We are O'odham, learning as we are going, caminando preguntan- do like our Mayan Zapatista compas, living each day to be good relatives and good ancestors to our future generations.

# Voting is Not Harm Reduction by Klee Benally & friends from Indigenous Action

When proclamations are made that “voting is harm reduction,” it’s never clear how less harm is actually calculated. Do we compare how many millions of undocumented Indigenous Peoples have been deported? Do we add up what political party conducted more drone strikes? Or who had the highest military budget? Do we factor in pipelines, mines, dams, sacred sites desecration? Do we balance incarceration rates? Do we compare sexual violence statistics? Is it in the massive budgets of politicians who spend hundreds of millions of dollars competing for votes?

Though there are some political distinctions between the two prominent parties in the so-called U.S., they all pledge their allegiance to the same flag. Red or blue, they’re both still stripes on a rag waving over stolen lands that comprise a country built by stolen lives.

We don’t dismiss the reality that, on the scale of U.S. settler colonial violence, even the slightest degree of harm can mean life or death for those most vulnerable. What we assert here is that the entire notion of “voting as harm reduction” obscures and perpetuates settler-colonial violence, there is nothing “less harmful” about it, and there are more effective ways to intervene in its violences.

At some point the left in the so-called U.S. realized that convincing people to rally behind a “lesser evil” was a losing strategy. The term “harm reduction” was appropriated to reframe efforts to justify their participation and coerce others to engage in the theater of what is called “democracy” in the U.S.

Harm reduction was established in the 1980s as a public health strategy for people dealing with substance use issues who struggle with abstinence. According to the Harm Reduction Coalition (HRC) the principles of harm reduction establish that the identified behavior is “part of life” so they “choose not to ignore or condemn but to minimize harmful effects” and work towards breaking social stigmas towards “safer use.” The HRC also states that, “there is no universal definition of or formula for implementing harm reduction.” Overall, harm reduction focuses on reducing adverse impacts associated with harmful behaviors.

The proposition of “harm reduction” in the context of voting means something entirely different from those organizing to address substance use issues. The assertion is that “since this political system isn’t going away, we’ll support politicians and laws that may do less harm.”

The idea of a ballot being capable of reducing the harm in a system rooted in colonial domination and exploitation, white supremacy, hetero-patriarchy, and capitalism is an extraordinary exaggeration. There is no person whose lives aren’t impacted everyday by these systems of oppression, but instead of coded reformism and coercive “get out the vote” campaigns towards a “safer” form of settler colonialism, we’re asking “what is the real and tragic harm and danger associated with perpetuating colonial power and what can be done to end it?”

Voting as practiced under U.S. “democracy” is the process with which people (excluding youth under the age of 18, convicted felons, those the state deems “mentally incompetent,” and undoc-

umented folx including permanent legal residents), are coerced to choose narrowly prescribed rules and rulers. The anarchist collective Crimethinc observes, “Voting consolidates the power of a whole society in the hands of a few politicians.” When this process is conducted under colonial authority, there is no option but political death for Indigenous Peoples. In other words, voting can never be a survival strategy under colonial rule. It’s a strategy of defeat and victimhood that protracts the suffering and historical harm induced by ongoing settler colonialism. And while the harm reduction sentiment may be sincere, even hard won marginal reforms gained through popular support can be just as easily reversed by the stroke of a politician’s pen. If voting is the democratic participation in our own oppression, voting as harm reduction is a politics that keeps us at the mercy of our oppressors.

While so many on the left—including some Indigenous radicals—are concerned with consolidation of power into fascists hands, they fail to recognize how colonial power is already consolidated. There is nothing intersectional about participating in and maintaining a genocidal political system. There’s no meaningful solidarity to be found in a politics that urges us to meet our oppressors where they’re at. Voting as harm reduction imposes a false solidarity upon those identified to be most vulnerable to harmful political policies and actions. In practice it plays out as paternalistic identity politicking as liberals work to identify the least dangerous candidates and rally to support their campaigns. The logic of voting as harm reduction asserts that whoever is facing the most harm will gain the most protection by the least dangerous denominator in a violently authoritarian system. This settler-colonial naivety places more people, non-human beings, and land at risk than otherwise. Most typically the same liberal activists that claim voting is harm reduction are found denouncing and attempting to suppress militant direct actions and sabotage as acts that “only harm our movement.” “Voting as harm reduction” is the pacifying language of those who police movements.

Voting as harm reduction is the government issued blanket of the democratic party, we’re either going to sleep or die in it.

To organize from a position that voting is an act of damage limitation blurs lines of the harm that settler and resource colonialism imposes.

Under colonial occupation all power operates through violence. There is absolutely nothing “less harmful” about participating in and perpetuating the political power of occupying forces. Voting won’t undue settler colonialism, white supremacy, hetero-patriarchy, or capitalism. Voting is not a strategy for decolonization. The entire process that arrived at the “Native vote” was an imposition of U.S. political identity on Indigenous Peoples fueled by white supremacy and facilitated by capitalism.

## **The Native Vote: A Strategy of Colonial Domination**

Prior to settler colonial invasion, Indigenous Peoples maintained diverse complex cultural organizations that were fairly unrecognizable to European invaders. From its inception, the U.S. recognized that Indigenous Peoples comprised distinct sovereign Nations. The projection of Nation status was committed on the terms of the colonizers who needed political entities to treaty with (primarily for war and economic purposes). As a result, social organizations of Indigenous Peoples faced extreme political manipulation as matriarchal and two-spirit roles were either completely disregarded or outright attacked. The imperative of the U.S. settler colonial project has

always been to undermine and destroy Indigenous sovereignty, this is the insidious *unnature* of colonialism.

In 1493 the Papal Bull “Inter Caetera,” was issued by Pope Alexander VI. The document established the “Doctrine of Discovery” and was central to Spain’s Christianizing strategy to ensure “exclusive right” to enslaved Indigenous Peoples and lands invaded by Columbus the year prior. This decree also made clear the Pope’s threat to forcibly assimilate Indigenous Peoples to Catholicism in order to strengthen the “Christian Empire.” This doctrine led to successive generational patterns of genocidal and ecocidal wars waged by European settler colonizers against Indigenous lives, lands, spirit, and the living world of all of our relations. In 1823 the “Doctrine of Discovery” was written into U.S. law as a way to deny land rights to Indigenous Peoples in the Supreme Court case, *Johnson v. McIntosh*. In a unanimous decision, Chief Justice John Marshall wrote that Christian European nations had assumed complete control over the lands of “America” during the “Age of Discovery”. And in declaring “independence” from the Crown of England in 1776, he noted, that the U.S. had in effect and thus by law inherited authority over these lands from Great Britain, “notwithstanding the occupancy of the natives, who were heathens...” According to the ruling, Indigenous Peoples did not have any rights as independent nations, but only as tenants or residents of the U.S. on their own lands. To this day, the “Doctrine of Discovery” has not been repudiated and *Johnson v. McIntosh* has not been overruled.

The genealogy of the Native vote is tied to boarding schools, Christian indoctrination, allotment programs, and global wars that established U.S. imperialism. U.S. assimilation policies were not designed as a benevolent form of harm reduction, they were an extension of a military strategy that couldn’t fulfill its genocidal programs. Citizenship was forced onto Indigenous Peoples as part of colonial strategy to, “Kill the Indian and save the man.”

There was a time when Indigenous Peoples wanted nothing to do with U.S. citizenship and voting.

Katherine Osborn, an ethnohistorian at Arizona State University states, “[Indigenous] polities hold a government-to-government relationship with the United States. Thus, their political status is unique, and that means that they are not just another minority group hoping for inclusion in the U.S. political order. For indigenous communities, protecting their sovereignty as tribal nations is the paramount political concern.”

When the U.S. constitution was initially created, each state could determine who could be citizens at their discretion. Some states rarely granted citizenship and thereby conferred the status to select Indigenous Peoples but only if they dissolved their tribal relationships and became “civilized.” This typically meant that they renounced their tribal affiliation, paid taxes, and fully assimilated into white society. Alexandra Witkin writes in *To Silence a Drum: The Imposition of United States Citizenship on Native Peoples*, “Early citizenship policy rested upon the assumption that allegiance could only be given to one nation; thus peoples with an allegiance to a Native nation could not become citizens of the United States.” The preference though was not to respect and uphold Indigenous sovereignty, but to condemn it as “uncivilized” and undermine it through extreme tactics of forced assimilation.

When the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified in 1868, it granted citizenship only to men born or naturalized in the U.S., this included former slaves but was interpreted to not apply to Indigenous Peoples except for those who assimilated and paid taxes. The 15th Amendment was subsequently passed in 1870 to ensure the right of U.S. citizens to vote without discrimination of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude” but was still interpreted to exclude

Indigenous Peoples who did not assimilate. In some ways this was an act of disenfranchisement, but more clearly it was a condition imposed upon Indigenous Peoples facing scorched-earth military campaigns and the threat of mass death marches to concentration camps. The message was clear, “assimilate or perish.”

In 1887, U.S. Congress passed the General Allotment Act, more commonly known as the Dawes Act, which was designed to expedite colonial invasion, facilitate resource extraction, and to further assimilate Indigenous Peoples into the colonial social order. The Dawes Act marked a shift from a military strategy to an economic and political one where reservations were separated into individual lots, with only male “heads of households” to receive 160 acres with any remaining lands put up for sale to white invaders who flocked in droves to inherit their “Manifest Destiny.” Indigenous Peoples who accepted allotments could receive U.S. citizenship, and although this was the first congressional act to provide the status, it came at the expense of sacrificing Indigenous People’s cultural and political identities in many ways, particularly by further fracturing the integrity of Indigenous matriarchal societies. Under the Dawes Act, Indigenous lands were reduced from 138 million to 52 million acres. In 1890, the overall Indigenous population was reduced to about 250,000 from tens of millions at the time of initial European invasion. In contrast, the colonizer’s U.S. population had increased to 62,622,250 the same year.

The legal destruction of Indigenous sovereign nations was fulfilled in Supreme Court decisions by judge John Marshall who wrote in 1831 that the Cherokee Nation was not a foreign nation, but rather that “They may, more correctly, perhaps, be denominated domestic dependent nations... Their relationship to the United States resembles that of a ward to its guardian.”

The U.S.’s genocidal military campaigns known collectively as the “Indian Wars” supposedly came to an end in 1924. That same year U.S. Congress passed the Indian Citizenship Act (ICA) which granted citizenship to Indigenous Peoples but still allowed for states to determine if they could vote. As a result, some states barred Indigenous Peoples from voting until 1957. Until passage of the ICA, which was a regulatory action approved with no hearings, Indigenous Peoples were considered “Domestic Subjects” of the U.S. Government.

The Haudeneshonee Confederacy completely rejected imposition of U.S. citizenship through the IAC and called it an act of treason.

Joseph Heath, General Counsel of the Onondaga Nation, writes, “The Onondaga Nation and the Haudenosaunee have never accepted the authority of the United States to make Six Nations citizens become citizens of the United States, as claimed in the Citizenship Act of 1924. We hold three treaties with the United States: the 1784 Treaty of Fort Stanwix, the 1789 Treaty of Fort Harmor and the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua. These treaties clearly recognize the Haudenosaunee as separate and sovereign Nations. Accepting United States citizenship would be treason to their own Nations, a violation of the treaties and a violation of international law...”

They rejected the ICA and “resisted its implementation immediately after its adoption, because they had the historical and cultural understanding that it was merely the latest federal policy aimed at taking their lands and at forced assimilation.”

Heath further adds, “For over four centuries the Haudenosaunee have maintained their sovereignty, against the onslaught of colonialism and assimilation, and they have continued with their duties as stewards of the natural world. They have resisted removal and allotment; they have preserved their language and culture; they have not accepted the dictates of Christian churches; and they have rejected forced citizenship.”

It's important to note, and paradoxical, that the colonizing architects of the U.S. constitution were influenced heavily by the Haudeneshonee Confederacy.

Zane Jane Gordon of the Wyandotte Nation critiqued the ICA at the time it was passed, "No government organized . . . can incorporate into its citizenship anybody or bodies without the[ir] formal consent...The Indians are organized in the form of 'nations,' and it has treaties with [other] nations as such. Congress cannot embrace them into the citizenship of the Union by a simple act."

In *Challenging American Boundaries: Indigenous People and the "Gift" of U.S. Citizenship*, Kevin Bruyneel writes that Tuscarora Chief Clinton Rickard, who strongly opposed passage of the ICA, "was also encouraged by the fact that 'there was no great rush among my people to go out and vote in white man's elections.'" Rickard stated, "By our ancient treaties, we expected the protection of the government. The white man had obtained most of our land and we felt he was obliged to provide something in return, which was protection of the land we had left, but we did not want to be absorbed and assimilated into his society. United States citizenship was just another way of absorbing us and destroying our customs and our government. . . . We feared citizenship would also put our treaty status in jeopardy and bring taxes upon our land. How can a citizen have a treaty with his own government. . . . This was a violation of our sovereignty. Our citizenship was in our own nations."

Haudeneshonee also voiced opposition to imposition of U.S. citizenship policies due to separation of their Nation by the Canadian border. These impacts are still faced by Indigenous Peoples whose lands are bisected by both the Canadian and Mexican borders. The imposition of citizenship has politically segregated their people along colonial lines.

Perhaps one of the clearest illustrations of assimilationist strategies regarding citizenship and voting comes from Henry S. Pancoast, one of the founders of the Christian white supremacist group, the Indian Rights Association (IRA). Pancoast stated, "Nothing [besides United States Citizenship] will so tend to assimilate the Indian and break up his narrow tribal allegiance, as making him feel that he has a distinct right and voice in the white man's nation."

The IRA's initial stated objective was to "bring about the complete civilization of the Indians and their admission to citizenship." The IRA considered themselves reformists and successfully lobbied Congress to establish the boarding school system, pass the Dawes Act, reform the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and pass the Indian Reorganization Act of 1834.

U.S. citizenship was imposed to destroy Indigenous sovereignty and facilitate mass-scale land theft. To this day, the "Native vote" is bound to assimilationist conditions that serve colonial interests.

## **Assimilation: The Strategy of Enfranchisement**

Historic acts of voter suppression appear to contradict the strategy of assimilation, after all, if white settler politicians desired so much for Indigenous Peoples to become citizens, why then would they actively disenfranchise them at the same time? This is the underlying contradiction of colonialism in the U.S. that has been articulated as the "Indian Problem," or more bluntly, the question of annihilation or assimilation?

As previously mentioned, it wasn't until 1957 that Indigenous Peoples could vote in every U.S. state.

According to Katherine Osborn, “Some states borrowed the language of the U.S. Constitution in Article 1, Section 2, which bars ‘Indians not taxed’ from citizenship and used it to deny voting rights. Legislators in Idaho, Maine, Mississippi, New Mexico and Washington withheld the franchise from their Indigenous citizens because those who were living on reservation lands did not pay property taxes. In New Mexico, Utah and Arizona, state officials argued that living on a reservation meant that Indians were not actually residents of the state, which prevented their political participation.”

Osborn adds, “Article 7, Section 2, of the Arizona constitution stated, ‘No person under guardianship, non-compos mentis, or insane shall be qualified to vote in any election.’ Arizona lawmakers understood this as prohibiting Indians from voting because they were allegedly under federal guardianship on their reservations.”

Early U.S. citizenship policy regarding Indigenous Peoples was clear; disenfranchisement would remain until we assimilated and abandoned our tribal statuses. Disenfranchisement was and is a strategy that sets conditions for assimilation. Suppression of political participation has historically been the way the system regulates and maintains itself. White supremacists that controlled the politics of areas where large Indigenous populations feared that they would become minority subjects in their own democratic system. They often subverted enfranchisement in violent ways, but this was never really a threat due to how embedded white supremacy has been in the totality of the U.S. settler colonial project.

It’s not that settler society has capitulated to Indigenous interests, it’s that Indigenous Peoples—whether through force or attrition—have been subsumed into the U.S. polity.

Perhaps no place is this more clear than through the establishment of Tribal Councils. For example, in 1923, the Navajo Tribal Council was created in order to legitimize resource extraction by the U.S. government. According to a report filed by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, the tribal council was “created in part so that oil companies would have some legitimate representatives of the Navajos through whom they could lease reservation lands on which oil had been discovered. The Navajo Nation Oil and Gas Company’s website states, “In 1923, a Navajo tribal government was established primarily for the Bureau of Indian Affairs to approve lease agreements with American oil companies, who [sic] were eager to begin oil operations on Navajo lands.”

In order to fulfill and maintain colonial domination and exploitation, colonizers shape and control the political identity of Indigenous Peoples. Capitalists facilitated and preyed on the dissolution of Indigenous autonomy. The cost of citizenship has always been our sovereignty, the conditions of citizenship have always been in service to white supremacy.

That Indigenous Peoples were granted the right to vote in 1924, yet our religious practices were outlawed until 1979 is one of many examples of the incongruity of Indigenous political identity in the so-called U.S.

Suffrage movements in the U.S. have fought for equal participation in the political system but have failed to indict and abolish the systems of oppression that underpin settler-colonial society. After decades of organizing, white women celebrated suffrage in 1920, which was granted in part as a reward for their service in World War 1. Hetero-patriarchy was not dismantled and Black folx were purposefully disregarded in their campaigning.

Lucy Parsons, an Afro-Indigenous anarchist was among many who critiqued suffrage at the time. Parsons wrote in 1905, “Can you blame an Anarchist who declares that man-made laws are not sacred?...The fact is money and not votes is what rules the people. And the capitalists

no longer care to buy the voters, they simply buy the ‘servants’ after they have been elected to ‘serve.’ The idea that the poor man’s vote amounts to anything is the veriest delusion. The ballot is only the paper veil that hides the tricks.”

Black folx suffered decades of white supremacist “Jim Crow Laws” that enforced racial segregation and were designed to suppress their political power. These racist laws didn’t end until the powerful mobilizations of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. The U.S. government handed down legislation in the 50s and 60s including the 1965 voting rights act, which was critiqued by revolutionary Black Nationalists such as Malcom X, “The ballot or the bullet. If you’re afraid to use an expression like that, you should get on out of the country; you should get back in the cotton patch; you should get back in the alley. They get all the Negro vote, and after they get it, the Negro gets nothing in return.”

Radical movements have either faced extreme state violence and repression or have been systematically assimilated into the U.S. political milieu. The non-profit industrial complex has operated as an unspoken ally of U.S. imperialism in efforts of suppression and pacification (see *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* by INCITE!). Perhaps this is the U.S. political machinery’s method of reducing harm or impact from effective social and environmental justice movements. If they can’t kill or imprison the organizers, then fold them into the bureaucracy or turn their struggles into businesses. At the end of the day, not everyone can be white supremacists, but everyone can be capitalists.

So long as the political and economic system remains intact, voter enfranchisement, though perhaps resisted by overt white supremacists, is still welcomed so long as nothing about the overall political arrangement fundamentally changes. The facade of political equality can occur under violent occupation, but liberation cannot be found in the occupier’s ballot box. In the context of settler colonialism voting is the “civic duty” of maintaining our own oppression. It is intrinsically bound to a strategy of extinguishing our cultural identities and autonomy.

The ongoing existence of Indigenous Peoples is the greatest threat to the U.S. settler colonial project, that we may one day rise up and assert our sovereign position with our lands in refutation of the Doctrine of Discovery.

In *Custer Died for your Sins*, Vine Deloria Jr. idealized “Indigenous peoples not as passive recipients of civil rights and incorporation into the nation-state but as colonized peoples actively demanding decolonization.”

## **You can’t decolonize the ballot**

Since the idea of U.S. “democracy” is majority rule, barring an extreme population surge, Indigenous voters will always be at the mercy “of good intentioned” political allies. Consolidating the Native vote into a voting bloc that aligns with whatever settler party, politician, or law that appears to do less harm isn’t a strategy to exercise political power, it’s Stockholm syndrome.

The Native vote also seeks to produce Native politicians. And what better way to assimilate rule then with a familiar face? The strategy of voting Indigenous Peoples into a colonial power structure is not an act of decolonization, it’s a fulfillment of it. We have a history of our people being used against us by colonial forces, particularly with assimilated Indigenous Peoples acting as “Indian Scouts” to aid the enemy’s military. In only one recorded instance, Ndee (Cibicue



Apache) Army Scouts mutinied against the U.S. when they were asked to fight their own people. Three of the Ndee scouts were executed as a result.

No matter what you are led to believe by any politician seeking office, at the end of the day they are sworn to uphold an oath to the very system that was designed to destroy us and our ways of life. The oath for members of Congress states, "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter: So help me God."

Even if we assume that their cultural values and intentions are in line with those of the people, it is rare that politicians are not tied to a string of funders. As soon as they get elected they are also faced with unrelenting special interest lobbying groups that have millions and millions of dollars behind them and, even if they have stated the best intentions, are inevitably outnumbered by their political peers.

Today we have candidates that were elected making promises to stop the mass scale kidnapping and murdering of Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people and what do they propose? They don't indict the resource colonizers destroying our lands whose very industry is precipitating this crisis of human trafficking and extreme gender violence. They don't propose ending capitalism and resource colonialism. They propose laws and more cops with more power to enforce those laws in our communities, so although we have an epidemic of police violence and murders against our peoples, Indigenous politicians address one violent crisis by making another one worse for our people. It's the fulfillment of the assimilationist cultural genocide of "killing the Indian to save the man." With that vote, the willful participation and sanctioning of the violence of this system, you kill the Indian and become "the man."

Tribal, local, and regional politics are situated in the same colonial arrangement that benefits the ruling class: politicians are concerned with rules and ruling, police and military enforce, judges imprison. Regardless of who and on what scale, no politician can ever represent Indigenous lifeways within the context of a political system established by colonialism.

A less harmful form of colonial occupation is fantasy. The process of colonial undoing will not occur by voting. You cannot decolonize the ballot.

## **Rejecting settler colonial authority, aka not voting.**

Voting in the colonizer's elections keeps Indigenous Peoples powerless.

Our power, broadly speaking, does not come from non-consensual majority rule top-down man-made laws but is derived in relation with and proportion to all living beings. This is a corporeal and spiritual power that has been in effect since time immemorial and is what has kept Indigenous Peoples alive in the face of more than 500 years of extreme colonial violence.

The late Ben Carnes, a powerful Choctaw advocate, is quoted in an article about the Native vote by Mark Maxey stating, "My position is that I am not a citizen of a government who perpetuates that lie that we are. Slavery was legal just as well as Jim Crow, but just because it is law doesn't make it right. We didn't ask for it, the citizenship act was imposed upon us as another step in their social and mental conditioning of Native people to confiscate them of their identity. It was also a legislative method of circumventing the 'Indians not taxed' clause of the Constitution, thereby

justifying imposing taxes. The U.S. electoral system is a very diseased method where candidates can be purchased by the highest corporate (contributor) bidder. The mentality of voting for the lesser of two evils is a false standard to justify the existence of only a two-party system. Checks and balances are lacking to ensure that public servants abide by the will of the people. The entire thing needs to be scrapped as well as the government itself.”

Voting will never be “harm reduction” while colonial occupation & U.S. imperialism reigns. In order to heal we have to stop the harm from occurring, not lessen it. This doesn’t mean simply abstinence or ignoring the problem until it just goes away, it means developing and implementing strategies and maneuvers that empower Indigenous People’s autonomy.

Since we cannot expect those selected to rule in this system to make decisions that benefit our lands and peoples, we have to do it ourselves. Direct action, or the unmediated expression of individual or collective desire, has always been the most effective means by which we change the conditions of our communities.

What do we get out of voting that we cannot directly provide for ourselves and our people? What ways can we organize and make decisions that are in harmony with our diverse lifeways? What ways can the immense amount of material resources and energy focused on persuading people to vote be redirected into services and support that we actually need? What ways can we direct our energy, individually and collectively, into efforts that have immediate impact in our lives and the lives of those around us?

This is not only a moral but a practical position and so we embrace our contradictions. We’re not rallying for a perfect prescription for “decolonization” or a multitude of Indigenous Nationalisms, but for a great undoing of the settler colonial project that comprises the United States of America so that we may restore healthy and just relations with Mother Earth and all her beings. Our tendency is towards autonomous anti-colonial struggles that intervene and attack the critical infrastructure that the U.S. and its institutions rest on. Interestingly enough, these are the areas of our homelands under greatest threat by resource colonialism. This is where the system is most prone to rupture, it’s the fragility of colonial power. Our enemies are only as powerful as the infrastructure that sustains them. The brutal result of forced assimilation is that we know our enemies better than they know themselves. What strategies and actions can we devise to make it impossible for this system to govern on stolen land?

We aren’t advocating for a state-based solution, redwashed European politic, or some other colonial fantasy of “utopia.” In our rejection of the abstraction of settler colonialism, we don’t aim to seize colonial state power but to abolish it.

We seek nothing but total liberation.

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# COVID-19, Resource Colonialism & Indigenous Resistance by Klee Benally

*Note: This was originally written May 2020 & published in part in Black Seed #8.*

*This version has been slightly revised & updated.*

*Diné Bikéyah (The Navajo Nation) has faced and endured the highest rate per-capita of COVID-19 cases than any settler colonial U.S. state.*

*As this respiratory virus wreaks havoc through these lands, mainstream media has again anointed our people as the mascots of poverty and victimization. The statistics are pounded loudly to evoke settler pity: Approximately 33% of our people have no running water or electricity. We live in a “food desert” with 13 grocery stores serving nearly 200,000 residents. Diné Bikéyah has approximately 50% unemployment. While these facts are not wrong, the solution is not more fundraisers for the “poor Indians.”*

Has this pandemic impacted our people so disproportionately simply because we merely lack power lines and plumbing? Is it just because there aren't massive corporate stores on every corner of our reservation? Would we really be that much more immune from this disease if every member of our tribe just had a job?

Dehumanizing narratives have always been part of the scenery here in the arid Southwest. If you blink on your way to the Grand Canyon, it's easy to miss the ongoing brutal context of colonization and the expansion of capitalism. We live here and we even don't see it ourselves. We're too busy putting up that “Nice Indians Behind You” sign.

As Navajo Nation politicians impose strict weekend curfews, prohibit ceremonial gatherings, and restrict independent mutual aid relief efforts. As notoriously racist so-called reservation “border towns” like “Gallup, New Mexico” dispose of infected unsheltered relatives and initiate “Riot Act Orders” to restrict the influx of Diné who rely on supplies held in their corporate stores, the specter of the reservation system's historical purpose haunts like a neglected ghost, pulling at our every breath, clinging to our bones.

What is omitted from the fever-pitched spectacle of COVID-19 disaster tourism, is that these statistics are due to ongoing attacks on our cultural ways of life, autonomy, and by extension our self and collective sufficiency.

While economic deprivation and resource scarcity are realities we face, our story is much more complex and more powerful than that, it's a story of the space between harmony and devastation. It's the story of our ancestors and of coming generations. It's a story of this moment of Indigenous mutuality and resistance.

## The Navajo Resource Colony & COVID-19

Colonial violence and violence against the earth has made our people more susceptible to viruses such as COVID-19.

While the COVID-19 virus spreads unseen throughout our region, a 2,500-square-mile cloud of methane is also concealed, hovering over Diné lands here in the “Four Corners” area. NASA researchers have stated, “the source is likely from established gas, coal, and coalbed methane mining and processing.” Methane is the second most prevalent greenhouse gas emitted in the so-called “United States” and can be up to 84 times more potent than carbon dioxide.

Two massive coal fired power plants, the San Juan Generating Station and the Four Corners Power Plant operate in the area. If regarded as a single entity, the two plants are the second largest consumer of coal in the “U.S.” Most of the generated power is transmitted right over and passed reservation homes to power settler colonies in “Arizona, Nevada and California.”

It’s not news that over time, breathing pollution from sources such as coal fired power plants damages the lungs and weakens the body’s ability to fight respiratory infections. U.S. settler universities and news outlets have acknowledged that exposure to air pollution is correlated with increased death rates from COVID-19. At the same time, the EPA has relaxed environmental regulations on air polluters in response to the pandemic, opening the door for colonial imposed resource extraction projects on Diné lands to intensify their efforts.

According to a recent report titled, “Exposure to air pollution and COVID-19 mortality in the United States,” COVID-19 patients in areas impacted by high levels of air pollution before the pandemic are more likely to die from the virus than patients in other parts of the “U.S.”

The New York Times published an article on the report stating that, “A person exposed to high levels of fine particulate matter is 15 percent more likely to die from the coronavirus than someone in a region with just one unit less of the fine particulate pollution.”

The report further states that, “Although the epidemiology of COVID-19 is evolving, we have determined that there is a large overlap between causes of deaths of COVID-19 patients and the diseases that are affected by long-term exposure to fine particulate matter.” The report also noted that, “On March 26, 2020 the US [Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)] announced a sweeping relaxation of environmental rules in response to the coronavirus pandemic, allowing power plants, factories and other facilities to determine for themselves if they are able to meet legal requirements on reporting air and water pollution.”

According to Navajo Nation Oil and Gas Company’s (NNOGC) website, “In 1923, a Navajo tribal government was established primarily for the Bureau of Indian Affairs to approve lease agreements with American oil companies, who [sic] were eager to begin oil operations on Navajo lands.”

Arguably, nearly every economic decision that the tribal government has made since then (with few exceptions) has facilitated further exploitation of Mother Earth for profit.

For every attack on Mother Earth waged by colonial entities, Diné have organized fiercely to protect Nahasdzáán dóó Yádilhil Bits’áádée Bee Nahaz’áanii or the Diné Natural Law.

Groups like Diné CARE have been mobilizing since the late 1980s to confront ecological and cultural devastation. Adella Begaye and her husband Leroy Jackson organized to protect the Chuska Mountains from logging by the Navajo Tribal government. They formed Diné CARE and challenged the operations. Jackson had reportedly obtained documents that showed Bureau of Indian Affairs officials were underhandedly working to get the tribe exempt from logging restrictions designed to protect endangered species in the area. He was found murdered shortly after.

In defiance of efforts by Diné environmental groups such as Diné CARE to stop coal mining and power plants in the face of global warming, former Navajo Nation Council Speaker Lorenzo

Bates declared, “war on coal is a war on the Navajo economy and our ability to act as a sovereign Nation.” At the time, the coal industry was responsible for 60% of the Navajo Nation’s general revenues. Bates stated that “These revenues represent our ability to act as a sovereign nation and meet our own needs.”

At the cost of our health and destruction of Mother Earth, politicians on the Navajo Nation have perpetuated and profited from coal-fired power plants and strip mines that have caused forced relocation of more than 20,000 Diné from Black Mesa and severe environmental degradation.

For forty-one years Peabody coal, which operated two massive strip mines on Black Mesa, consumed 1.2 billion gallons a year of water from the Navajo aquifer beneath the area. Although the mines are now closed and the Navajo Generating Station (NGS) coal-fired power plant they fed is also shuttered, the impacts to health, the environment, and vital water sources in the area have been severe. The NGS project was initially established with the purpose of providing power to pump water to the massive metropolitan areas of Phoenix and Tucson. For decades, while powerlines criss-crossed over Diné family’s homes and water was pumped hundreds of miles away for swimming pools and golf courses, thousands of Diné went without running water and electricity.

Diné environmental groups such as Black Mesa Water Coalition and Tó Nizhóní Ání’, who have long resisted resource colonialism on Dził Yijiin (Black Mesa), recently celebrated the shutdown of NGS while the Navajo Nation scrambled to keep the outdated power plant operating arguing that it was vital to the Navajo economy. What was ignored in the melee was that the owners and operators of the coal fired power plant were motivated to shift towards natural gas that has become cheaper due to fracking.

In 2019 the Navajo Nation further doubled down on coal by purchasing three coal mines in the Powder River Basin area located in so-called Wyoming and Montana. Approximately 40 percent of the so-called U.S.’s coal comes from the area, contributing to more than 14 percent of the total carbon pollution in the “U.S.” The deal also forced the Navajo Transitional Energy Company (NTEC) to waive its sovereign immunity as a condition to buy the mines from a company that had just declared bankruptcy.

Today there are currently more than 20,000 natural gas wells and thousands more proposed in and near the Navajo Nation in the San Juan Basin, a geological structure spanning approximately 7,500 square miles in the Four Corners. The US EPA identifies the San Juan Basin as “the most productive coalbed methane basin in North America.” In 2007 alone, corporations extracted 1.32 trillion cubic feet of natural gas from the area, making it the largest source in the United States. Halliburton, who “pioneered” hydraulic fracturing in 1947, has initiated “refracturing” of wells in the area. Fracking also wastes and pollutes an extreme amount of water. A single coalbed methane well can use up to 350,000 gallons, while a single horizontal shale well can use up to 10 million gallons of water. As I’ve mentioned previously, this is a region with approximately 30 percent of households without access to running water.

The San Juan Basin is also viewed as “the most prolific producer of uranium in the United States.” Uranium is a radioactive heavy metal used as fuel in nuclear reactors and weapons production. It is estimated that 25% of all the recoverable uranium remaining in the country is on Diné Bikéyah. During the so-called “Cold War,” Diné lands were heavily exploited by the nuclear industry. From 1944 to 1986 some 30 million tons of uranium ore were extracted from mines. Diné workers were told little of the potential health risks with many not given any protective

gear. As demand for uranium decreased the mines closed, leaving over a thousand contaminated sites. To this day none have been completely cleaned up.

In 1979 the single largest accidental release of radioactivity occurred on Diné Bikéyah at the Church Rock uranium mill. More than more than 1,100 tons of solid radioactive mill waste and 94 million gallons of radioactive tailings poured into the Puerco River when an earthen dam broke. Today, water in the downstream community of “Sanders, Arizona” is poisoned with radioactive contamination from the spill.

Although uranium mining is now banned on the reservation due to advocacy from Diné anti-nuclear organizers, Navajo politicians recently sought to allow new mining in areas already contaminated by the industry’s toxic legacy.

In 2013 Navajo Nation Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie proposed a resolution to undermine the ban, his efforts were shut down by Diné No Nukes, a grassroots organization “dedicated to create a Navajo Nation that is free from the dangers of radioactive contamination and nuclear proliferation.” There are more than 2,000 estimated toxic abandoned uranium mines on and around the Navajo Nation. Twenty-two wells that provide water for more than 50,000 Diné have been closed by the EPA due to high levels of radioactive contamination. The recent push for nuclear power as “clean energy” has made the region more vulnerable to new uranium mining, including an in situ leach mine (which uses a process similar to fracking) right next to Mt. Taylor, one of the six Diné holy mountains.

Exposure to uranium can occur through the air, water, plants and animals and can be ingested, breathed in or absorbed through the skin. Although there has never been a comprehensive human health study on the impacts of uranium mining in the area, the EPA states that exposure to uranium can impair the immune system, cause high blood pressure, kidney disease, lung and bone cancer, and more. An ongoing effort called the Navajo Birth Cohort Study has also detected uranium in the urine of babies born to Diné women exposed to uranium.

In the book *Bitter Water: Diné Oral Histories of the Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute*, Roberta Blackgoat, my grandmother and a matriarch of Diné resistance to forced relocation on Black Mesa, stated, “The Coal they strip mine is the earth’s liver. The earth’s internal organs are dug up. Mother Earth must sit down. The uranium they dug up for energy was her lungs. Her heart and her organs are dug up because of greed. It is smog on the horizons. Her breath, her warmth, is polluted now and she is angry when Navajos talk of their sickness. The coal dust in winter blows in to blanket the land like a god down the canyons. It is very painful to the lungs when you catch a cold. The symptoms go away slowly when dry coal dust blows in from strip mining. The people say the uranium can dry up your heart. No compassion is left for the motherland. We’ve become her enemy.”

Diné elders who have resisted forced relocation on Black Mesa have faced constant attacks on their ways of life, particularly through confiscation of livestock. The systematic destruction of Indigenous subsistence lifeways throughout Diné Bikéyah has been a strategy waged since the beginning of colonial invasions on these lands. This devastation has been profitable to Navajo politicians who seek to maintain our role as a resource colony.

In 2015 the EPA accidentally released more than 3 million gallons of toxic waste from the Gold King Mine into the Animas River. The toxic spill flowed throughout Diné communities polluting the “San Juan” river which many Diné farmers rely on. Crops were spoiled that year. As a measure of relief for the water crisis, the EPA initially sent rinsed out fracking barrels. Chili Yazzie, the former Chapter President of Shiprock stated, “Disaster upon catastrophe in Shiprock. The water

transport company that was hired by EPA to haul water from the non-contaminated San Juan River set up 11 large 16,000 gallon tanks throughout the farming areas in Shiprock and filled them up with water for the crops. As they started to take water from the tanks for their corn and melons, the farmers noticed the water from some of tanks was rust colored, smelled of petroleum and slick with oil.”

Resource colonialism specifically targets Indigenous women, two-spirit, and trans relatives, as we see connected through the mass killings addressed through the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, Trans, & Two-Spirits (#MMIWGT2S). #MMIWGT2S is a campaign initiated in so-called “Canada” to address extremely disproportionate and unreported violence against Indigenous womxn. The movement has been extended to Missing and Murdered Girls, Trans and Two-Spirit relatives (MMIWGT2S) due to the alarming levels of gender-based violence that are invisibilized.

initially focused on the link between resource colonialism and gender-based violence. The extractive industry’s “man camps” which are sites at large-scale extractive industry projects where male workers are clustered in temporary housing encampments in areas close to reservations. For years Indigenous communities have raised concerns regarding these issues and only very recently the #MMIWGT2S movement has been more broadly recognized.

Violence of resource colonialism is violence against the land, which is violence against our bodies.

## **Food Deserts: A Project of Colonial Violence**

Our health has been broken by nutritionally-related illnesses imposed by colonial attacks on our cultural food systems. Diné Bikéyah wasn’t a “food desert” until colonization. According to the American Diabetes Association, “People with diabetes do face a higher chance of experiencing serious complications from COVID-19. In general, people with diabetes are more likely to experience severe symptoms and complications when infected with a virus.”

One in three Diné are diabetic or pre-diabetic, in some regions, health care workers have reported diagnosing diabetes in every other patient.

In 2014, Diné organizer Dana Eldridge published a powerful report on Diné Food Sovereignty through the Diné Policy Institute. In the report the concept of the Navajo Nation as a “food desert” was contextualized as a process of colonialism and capitalism.

The report identified a Food Desert as “an area, either urban or rural, without access to affordable fresh and healthy foods. While food deserts are devoid of accessible healthy food, unhealthy, heavily processed foods are often readily available... [Food Deserts] are linked with high rates of nutritionally-related illness. For rural communities, the United States Department of Agriculture has defined rural food desert as regions with low-income populations, the closest supermarket is further than twenty miles away and people have limited vehicle access....Diné people with limited or no income are limited in their food choices, and since healthy, fresh foods are of greater cost, people with limited financial resources often have no other option than to purchase low-cost, heavily processed, high calorie foods which lead to the onset of nutritionally-related illnesses.”

The report found that a majority of participants from Diné communities who participated in the study had to travel at least 155 miles round trip for groceries while others regularly drove



up to 240 miles. There are 13 full service grocery stores in the Navajo Nation, according to the report one of the stores contained 80% processed foods.

The report further stated that “An examination of the Navajo Nation food system reveals that our current food system not only does not serve the needs of the Navajo Nation, but also negatively impacts the wellbeing of the Diné people. These issues include epidemic levels of nutritionally-related illness including diabetes and obesity, food insufficiency (high rates of hunger), significant leakage of Navajo dollars to border towns, disintegration of Diné lifeways and K’é (the ancient system of kinship observed between Diné people and all living things in existence), among other issues; all while the Navajo Nation grapples with extremely high rates of unemployment, dependence on Natural Resource extraction revenue and unstable federal funding.”

Our homelands didn’t become a “food desert” by accident or lack of economic infrastructure, the history of food scarcity in our communities is directly correlated with a history of violent colonial invasion.

After facing fierce Diné resistance in the mid-1800s, “U.S.” troops invaded and attacked Canyon De Chelly in the heart of Diné Bikéyah. They employed “scorched earth tactics” by burning homes along with every field and orchard they encountered. “U.S.” Colonel Kit Carson led a campaign of terror to drive Diné on what is called “The Long Walk” to a concentration camp called Fort Sumner hundreds of miles away in eastern “New Mexico.” The report states:

“Carson’s scorched earth campaign including the slaughtering of livestock, burning of fields and orchards, and the destruction of water sources. This scorched earth policy effectively starved many Diné people into surrender. Word reached those who had not been captured that food was being distributed at Fort Defiance. Many families chose to go to the fort to alleviate their hunger and discuss peace, unaware of Carleton’s plans for relocation. Upon arrival at the fort, the Diné found they could not return back to their homes and were captives of the United States military...Due to failure of crops, restrictions on hunting, and the unavailability of familiar native plants, the Diné had to depend on the United States military to feed them, marking a major turning point in the history of Diné food and self-sufficiency. Food rations were inadequate and extremely poor in nutritional content, consisting primarily of salted pork, cattle, flour, salt, sugar, coffee and lard.”

When colonizers established military forts while waging brutal wars against Indigenous Peoples, they would also provide rations as a means of pacification and assimilation.

The book *Food, Control, and Resistance: Rations and Indigenous Peoples in the United States and South Australia* illustrates how food rationing programs were a tool of colonization and worked alongside assimilation policies to weaken Indigenous societies and bring Indigenous peoples under colonial control. Once Indigenous peoples became dependent on these food rations, government officials deliberately manipulated them, determining where and when the food would be distributed, restricting the kind and amount of foods that were distributed, and determining who the foods would be distributed to. Starvation was weaponized materially and politically.

The strategy of settler societies was to destroy the buffalo, sheep, corn fields, water sources, and anything that fed Indigenous Peoples to diminish our autonomy and create dependency.

As colonial military strategies increasingly focused on attacking Indigenous food systems, liberation and redistribution of resources was not unfamiliar to our ancestors, they effectively

raided colonizer's supplies and burned their forts to the ground. But clearly the scorched earth strategies were devastatingly effective.

Starting in the 1930's the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) ordered a reduction of Diné livestock herds. BIA officials killed the herds "and left them to rot, all in front of Diné families. Some herds were even driven off cliffs, while others were doused with kerosene and burned alive." This mass killing of animals seriously impaired the self-sufficiency of Diné. Many had to rely on government rations and a growing trading post economy to feed their families. Although the political justification for the extreme reduction was to mitigate soil erosion, the report illustrates that other factors such as "desertification and deteriorating rangeland, such as climatic change, periodic drought, invasion of exotic vegetation, and a drop in water table," were the primary issues.

In 1968 the first grocery store opened on the Navajo Nation in Tségháhoodzání (Window Rock, "Arizona").

The report illustrates that:

"the impact of these grocery stores and the decline of Diné foods were documented in nutritional research. By the 1980's, soda and sweetened drinks, store bought bread, and milk were commonplace in the Navajo Diet, while fry-bread and tortillas, potatoes, mutton, and coffee continued as staples. Although many Navajo families still farmed (corn, squash, and melon reported as the most cultivated crops), gardens were generally small and 'no longer appeared to be a major source of food for many families...In addition to dietary changes, the shift in Diné life and society also include the breakdown of self-sufficiency, Diné knowledge, family and community, and detachment from land. These changes did not occur by chance, but were fostered by a series of American interventions and policies (the process of colonization); namely forced removal, the livestock reduction, boarding schools, relocation, and food distribution programs, along with the change from subsistence lifestyles to wage based society and integration into American capitalism....Prior to American efforts of colonization, Diné people operated in a food system that was not only integral to our culture, but one in which Diné people actively produced and collected the food needed to feed their communities. This meant that Diné people did not depend on outside governments and systems for food. Not only did the people ensure that quality and nutritious food was provided, but they did so without operating under the authority or governance of these outside entities."

In the conclusion of the report, the Diné Policy Institute recommended, "revitalizing traditional foods and traditional food knowledge through the reestablishment of a self-sufficient food system for the Diné people."

In typical fashion, the colonial government and Navajo politicians have deepened the assimilation process through their efforts to reform the food desert issue, by starting a farming initiative that purchases seed from Syngenta and Monsanto and that uses tax incentives to make healthy food more affordable, furthering Dine peoples dependence on commodified food.

Although the Navajo Tribal Council established a mass-scale farming initiative called "Navajo Agricultural Products Industry (NAPI)," the farm has stated on its website that it plants genetic hybrid corn seed purchased from "Pioneer Seed Company, Syngenta Inc., and Monsanto companies." In 2014, in an attempt to "curb" the diabetes epidemic, the Navajo Nation Council created a law that raised the sales tax for cheap junk foods sold on Navajo Nation and another removing sales tax from fresh fruits and vegetables. Economic pressure on those already struggling

while not addressing the root causes and environmental degradation is par for the course for the colonial government and Navajo politicians.

Instead of directly feeding ourselves and communities, we have become dependent on businesses and corporations that are more concerned with profits than our health and well-being. The boarding schools were replete with capitalist indoctrination to forcibly assimilate Diné children into colonial society. The curriculum was designed with a clear lesson: To feed our families we needed jobs. To have jobs we needed to be trained. To be trained we needed to obey. To not have a job means you're poor. To employ other workers is to build wealth. To build wealth means success.

The process of destroying Indigenous self and collective sufficiency is an ongoing process of capitalist assimilation. Starvation is still weaponized against our people.

We cannot talk about economic deprivation and lack of resources without talking about history, we cannot address the COVID-19 crisis without addressing the crises of capitalism and colonialism. The disappearance & annihilation of Indigenous People has always been part of the project of resource extraction and colonialism.

## **A Virulent Faith**

On March 7, 2020 in the small remote community of Chilchimbeto in Diné Bikéyah, a christian group held a rally and "Day of Prayer" in response to the coronavirus outbreak. According to one report a pastor was coughing during his sermon. On March 17th, the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed on the reservation with Chilchimbeto as the epicenter of a growing outbreak. On the 18th the Nation closed itself to visitors. On March 20, as confirmed COVID-19 cases doubled then tripled, the Navajo Nation issued a shelter-in-place order for everyone living on the reservation and imposed a curfew 10 days later.

As schools were closed in response to the crisis, the Rocky Ridge Boarding School — located on Black Mesa just near lands partitioned in the so-called Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute — stayed open. Staff at the school had participated in the Chilchimbeto Christian rally and its roughly 100 students were exposed to the virus.

This is not the first time that Christians and boarding schools have exposed our lands and Indigenous Peoples to a pandemic. COVID-19 is not the first virus our people have faced.

From measles, smallpox infected blankets, to the influenza epidemic of 1918 (when an estimated 2,000 Diné perished), Indigenous Peoples have long been familiar with the colonial strategies of biological warfare. Some estimates state that approximately 20 million Indigenous People may have died in the years following the first wave of European invasion due to diseases brought by colonizers— up to 95% of the population of the so-called "Americas." The colonization of the "Americas" was a christianizing strategy codified in the 1493 Papal Bull "Inter Caetera" to ensure "exclusive right" to enslave Indigenous Peoples and take their lands.

As documented heavily in 1763, during an ongoing siege on the colonial military outpost called "Fort Pitt" led by Obwandiyag (Odawa Nation, aka Pontiac), British invaders used smallpox infected blankets as a biological weapon. The British general, Jeffrey Amherst had written, "Could it not be contrived to send the smallpox among those disaffected Tribes of Indians? We must, on this occasion, use every stratagem in our power to reduce them."

In 1845, John Louis O'Sullivan declared the "American" belief in the "God-given mission" of the so-called United States as "manifest destiny." This idea accelerated the colonial violence of "American" expansion.

Under the so-called "Peace Policy" of "U.S." President Grant, reservations were to be administered by Christian denominations which were allowed to forcibly convert Indigenous Peoples to Christianity. By 1872, 63 of 75 reservations were being managed by Christian religious groups. The "Peace Policy" also established that if Indigenous Peoples refused to move onto reservations, they would be forcibly removed from their ancestral lands by U.S. soldiers. These white supremacist Christian policies led to laws passed by "U.S." Congress in 1892 against Indigenous religions. Any Indigenous Person who advocated their cultural beliefs, held religious dances, and those involved in religious ceremonies were to be imprisoned.

Total assimilation was also the ultimate goal of the violently dehumanizing "U.S." boarding school project. It was a religiously based white supremacist process to "kill the Indian and save the man," with the goal of "civilizing" or compelling Indigenous people to be "productive" members of settler society. Every menial job skill of the subsequent assimilation era represented a rung on a ladder that our people were compelled to climb for their "higher" education took them farther away from our cultural knowledge systems and self/collective reliance further into a system of economic exploitation. It was also a strategy to fulfill land theft through erasure of Indigenous connections and reliance on our lands.

Capitalism is an economic and political system based on profit motive, competition, free market, and private property and is characterized by extreme individualism. It's genealogy is rooted in slavery, genocide, and ecocide. Resource colonialism is the systematic domination and exploitation of Indigenous lands and lives to benefit the attacking non-Indigenous social order. This is different from settler colonialism, which is the invasion, dispossession, and/or eradication of Indigenous lands and lives with the purpose of establishing non-Indigenous occupation of those lands.

To this end, economic development models to address "poverty" in our communities only mean our people will continue to be dependent and ultimately solidify the arrangement that was established through colonial and capitalist domination of our lands and peoples. The process of "indigenizing" or "decolonizing" wealth in this context only makes us that much more complicit in our own genocide.

The colonial project is largely incomplete as our cultures are incompatible with capitalism. There is no duality of Indigenous and capitalist identity, they exist diametrically opposed as natural and unnatural enemies. Ultimately only one can exist while the other must perish.

In the midst of geopolitical battles for minerals, oil, and gas in the Navajo Nation resource colony, environmentalists have cried for a "just transition" into a "green economy." By urging for "new deals" to make capitalism more eco-friendly and sustaining unsustainable ways of life through solar or wind energy, all while the underlying exploitative power relationships remain intact. This arrangement doesn't seek to end colonial relations with resource extractive industries, it red/greenwashes and advances them.

In this way both Navajo Nation politicians and non-profit environmental groups (and even some proclaimed radical ones) are in the same business of fulfilling the expansion of capitalism on our lands.

Throughout our lands of painted deserts, our bleeding is obscured by red ochre sunsets kissing rough brown skin. This is where gods are still at war in the minds of those obsessed with words in books that are not our own. Everything is desecrated. Everything is for sale.

From Mother Earth to our bodies, in capitalism everything has been reduced to a commodity. As long as it can be sold, bought, or otherwise exploited, nothing is sacred. So long as the lands (and by extension our bodies) are viewed this way we will have conflict, as capitalism is the enemy of Mother Earth and all which we hold to be sacred.

## **Missionizing Charity & Allyship**

Diné families in the remote region of Black Mesa on Diné Bikéyah — in particular those impacted by forced relocation — have long been the perpetually “impoverished” fascinations of aspiring white saviors. Self-appointed allies, ranging in political spectrum from anarchists to Christian missionaries have rushed to provide support through “food runs” and other forms of charity. They keep a tidy arrangement providing for some families and leaving others out, building long-term relationships that fill accounts somewhere, all the while providing maintenance to the very system of rationing and control that was set in place during the so-called “Indian Wars.”

This brand of “charity” continues to be a strategy of colonial societies to control Indigenous Peoples throughout the world. Non-profit industry operatives (allies and Indigenous non-profits) missionize capitalist and colonial dependency, all while starving our people of their autonomy. They functionally are the new forts of the old wars.

Settler and resource colonialism and capitalism have been and continue to be the crisis that has dispossessed Indigenous Peoples throughout the world from our very means of survival.

From scorched earth campaigns that intentionally destroyed our fields and livestock and forced us to rely on government and missionary rations, to the declarations of our communities as perpetually “impoverished” disaster zones by Christian groups, non-profit organizations, and even some radical support projects, our autonomy has consistently been under attack. This is exacerbated today by those who perpetuate and benefit from cycles of dependency veiled as acts of “charity.”

In its obscene theater, ally-politics have nearly become a characterization of Dances with Wolves. Whether it’s self-discovery and guilt-distancing decolonial projects or groups such as Showing Up for Racial Justice and the Catalyst Project parachuting to the frontlines of Indigenous struggles (from Big Mountain to Standing Rock), the fetishist settler gaze rarely sees beyond the periphery of its own interests and comfort. In endless workshops and zoom meetings, it centers understandings of resistance and liberation on its own terms. This is most obvious when these false friends chase another social justice paycheck or abandon us when things get hard. The ally-industrial complex is in the process of colonizing Indigenous resistance. “Allies” are the new missionaries.

Settler society is grappling with how to understand and respond to this crisis, but for that to fully occur they have to come to terms with how their ways and understanding of the world has been built on a linear timeline, and how that timeline is coming to an end. Instead of fetishizing this ending with fantasies of apocalyptic survival and savior scenarios, this is the time of dirty hands, it’s a time of direct action, meaningful solidarity and critical interventions. It’s a time of solidarity and ceremony. If we are to have true solidarity and not charity on stolen lands, we

must establish reciprocal terms that have a deep understanding of ongoing legacies of colonial violence.

## **Indigenous Mutual Aid is Necessary**

In early March 2020 mutual aid projects started mobilizing in Diné Bikéyah. As of this writing more than 30 groups are coordinating emergency relief in various forms of direct actions throughout our communities.

The idea of collective care and support, of ensuring the well-being of all our relations in non-hierarchical voluntary association, and taking direct action has always been something that translated easily into Diné Bizáad (Navajo language). T'áá ni'ínít'éego t'éiyá is a translation of this idea of autonomy. Many young people are still raised with the teaching of t'áá hwó' aji t'éego, which means if it is going to be it is up to you. No one will do it for you. Ké', or our familial relations, guides us so that no one would be left to fend for themselves. I've listened to many elders assert that this connection through our clan system, that established that we are all relatives in some way so we have to care for each other, was the key for survival of those who were imprisoned at Fort Sumner. It's important to also understand that Ké' does not exclude our non-human relatives or the land.

Indigenous Peoples have long established practices of caring for each other for our existence. As our communities have a deep history with organizing to support each other in times of crisis, we already have many existing models of mutual aid organizing to draw from.

This has looked like a small crew coordinating their relatives or friends to chop wood and distribute to elders. It has looked like traditional medicine herbal clinics and sexual health supply distribution. It has looked like community water hauling efforts or large scale supply runs to ensure elders have enough to make it through harsh winters. It has looked like unsheltered relative support through distribution of clothing, food, and more.

Any time individuals and groups in our communities have taken direct action (not by relying on politicians, non-profit organizations, or other indirect means) and supported others—not for their own self-interests but out of love for their people, the land, and other beings—this is what we know as “mutual aid.”

When we recognize that we're all in this together, that no one is better than anyone else and we have to take care of each other to survive, this is what anarchists have come to call, “Mutual Aid.” It's a practice that anarchist author Peter Kropotkin wrote about in his book published in 1902 called “Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution.” His analysis was established in large part by observing how Indigenous communities cooperated for survival in contrast to existing European notions that attempted to assert that competition and domination were “natural” human behaviors. Kropotkin understood mutual aid as a law of nature, that when you observe and listen to nature, you understand that life thrives not by struggling for existence or the shallow notion of survival of the fittest, but through mutual support, cooperation, and mutual defense. We never needed and still don't need dead white men from Europe to instruct us on how to live.

Indigenous Mutual Aid organizing challenges “charity” models of organizing and relief support that historically have treated our communities as “victims” and only furthered dependency and stripped our autonomy from us. We organize counter to non-profit capitalists who maintain neo-

colonial institutions and we reject the NGO-ization and non-profit commodification of mutual aid.

While solidarity means actively and meaningfully supporting each other, it also doesn't mean blind illusions of "unity" or that we must flatten out the diverse cultural and political ways and views that each of us maintains. There are some necessary tensions and factions in our communities and in radical Indigenous politics. Some Indigenous non-profits such as the NDN "Collective" and Navajo & Hopi Families COVID-19 Relief Fund (NHFCRF) have made millions of dollars from relief efforts in response to this pandemic. Relief has become big business while root causes are reinforced and further entrenched. To illustrate the disconnect of analysis, the NHFCRF started distributing coal for Diné and Hopi families to burn to stay warm in the cold depths of winter. Others are proposing a "revolutionary Indigenous socialist" agenda in an academic vanguard charge to proletarianize Indigenous ways through redwashed Marxism. This re-contextualizing of Marx and Engels' political reactions to European capitalism does nothing to forward Indigenous autonomy. The process inherently alienates diverse and complex Indigenous social compositions by compelling them to act as subjects of an authoritarian revolutionary framework based on class and industrial production. Indigenous collectivities and mutuality exists in ways that leftist political ideologues can't and refuse to imagine. As to do so would conflict with the primary architecture their world is built on, and no matter how it's re-visioned, the science of dialectical materialism isn't a science produced by Indigenous thinking. Colonial politics from both the left and the right are still colonial politics.

As the pandemic of COVID-19 wreaks havoc on our communities and threatens those most vulnerable such as our elders, those with existing health conditions due to colonial diets, ecological devastation, and polluting industries, immunocompromised, unsheltered relatives, and others, there is a clear need for organized mutual aid. Considering the cultural contexts, needs, and especially the history of colonial violence and destruction of our means of self and collective sufficiency, a distinct formation of Indigenous Mutual Aid and Mutual Defense, is necessary.

Indigenous Mutual Aid is not just about redistributing resources, it's about radical redistribution of power to restore our lifeways, heal our communities, and the land.

## **Prophecy & Medicine**

Just two generations after The Long Walk & mass imprisonment at Fort Sumner, Diné Bikéyah was faced with the influenza epidemic of 1918. Before the outbreak of the flu, my grandmother Zonnie Benally, who was a medicine practitioner, was given a warning when a saddle spontaneously caught fire. After praying she understood that a sickness would come correlated with a meteor shower, and that by eating horse meat she could survive. Zonnie Benally spread the word and urged people to prepare by going into isolation. The sickness also came after a total solar eclipse, which medicine people warned would bring harm to our people.

Dook'o'oskíid is one of six holy mountains for Diné, we were instructed to live within the boundaries of these pillars that uphold our cosmology. Arizona Snowbowl ski resort has been pumping millions of gallons of treated sewage from the City of Flagstaff to make fake snow on these sacred slopes. Since the Forest Service "manages" the sacred mountain as "public lands," they sanction this desecration.

When the initial proposal was made to desecrate the mountain, medicine practitioners testified in court that this extreme disturbance and poisoning of the mountain would have severe consequences for all peoples. Their testimony was prophetic.

Daniel Peaches, member of the Diné Medicine Men's Association stated, "Once the tranquility and serenity of the Mountain is disturbed, the harmony that allows for life to exist is disrupted. The weather will misbehave, the ground will shift and tremble, the land will no longer be hospitable to life. The natural pattern of life will become erratic and the behaviors of animals and people will become unpredictable. Violence will become the norm and agitation will rule so peace and peacefulness will no longer be possible. The plants will not produce berries and droughts will be so severe as to threaten all existence."

In 1996 two holy people visited an elder near Rocky Ridge where the Black Mesa outbreak occurred. They had been visiting and sharing messages for some time, & when Sarah Begay, the daughter of the elder came home one day, she saw the holy beings. All of the messages that had been shared were verified by Hataaliiis (medicine practitioners). It became a situation because the family's ancestral lands were claimed in a constructed "land-dispute" with the Hopi tribe. Albert Hale, then Navajo Nation president (who has recently passed due to COVID-19) even declared a "day of prayer." Their message was prophecy. It spoke of the elders & times we live in now. There were conditions set & what they spoke has unfolded.

The Diné Policy Institute Food Sovereignty Report also found prophecy in their study, "...it is said that the Holy People shared with the Diné people the teachings of how to plant, nurture, prepare, eat and store our sacred cultivated crops, such as corn. The importance of these teachings to our well-being was made clear in that the Holy People shared that we would be safe and healthy until the day that we forgot our seeds, our farms, and our agriculture. It was said that when we forgot these things, we would be afflicted by disease and hardship again, which is what some elders point to as the onset of diabetes, obesity and other ills facing Diné people today."

In response to ongoing attempts to remove her from her land and confiscate her livestock, Roberta Blackgoat stated, "This land is a sacred land. The man's law is not our law. Nature, food and the way we live is our law. The plans to disrupt and dig out sacred sites are against the Creator's law. Our great ancestors are buried all over, they have become sand, they have become the mountains and their spiritual presence is still here to guide us... We resist in order to keep this sacred land in place. We are doing this for our children."

Pauline Whitesinger, a Diné matriarch in the resistance against forced relocation on Black Mesa once said, "Washington D.C., is the cause of a lot of hardship and disaster. It's like a human virus with side effects."

When I asked my father Jones Benally, a medicine practitioner, what he thought of this current crisis he said, "I've been telling you to prepare for this." And he has, especially since another recent solar eclipse. He said, "The government won't take care of us. They're part of the reason nature is attacking."

We have survived massacres and forced marches, we have endured reservations and boarding schools, we have faced forced sterilizations and national sacrifice zones. We have resisted attacks on Mother Earth as we have long held that the balance and harmony of creation is intrinsically tied to our wellbeing and the health of all living beings. Our immune systems are compromised due to colonial diets and ecocide. From abandoned uranium mines poisoning our lands and waters, to coal mining, fracking, oil pipelines, and desecration of our most sacred sites, we have become more susceptible to this and other diseases due to capitalism and colonialism.



Our prophecies warned of the consequences for violating Mother Earth. Our ways of being have guided us through the endings of worlds before. We listen now more than ever to our ancestors, the land, and our medicine carriers. In these times we care for each other more fiercely than ever. We are living the time of prophecy. The systems that precipitated this disharmony will not lead us through or out of it, they will only craft new chains and cages. As the sickness ravages our lands, we must ask ourselves, “will we continue to allow this empire to recuperate?”

I’ve grown up in a world of ruins. We have teachings and prophecies of the endings of cycles, but that’s always how it’s been here, in this world of harmony and disharmony and destruction. Diné teach this as Hózhóji and Anaaji.

An anti-colonial and anti-capitalist world already exists, but as my father says, “there aren’t two worlds, there is just one world with many paths.” Colonial and capitalist paths are linear by design. In this space between harmony and devastation, we listen to these cycles, we listen to the land, and we conspire. If the path of greed, domination, exploitation, and competition doesn’t accept that it’s reached its dead end, then it is up to us to make sure of it.

# **Your loneliness is a public health problem by Goat**

The most fully realized community that exists, in this society, is the community of money, and money abolishes community because it abolishes trust. Communities create their lives through common action which can only take place through endless communication founded on trust. Money's abolition of community is also the abolition of communication. We experience the absence of communication in our daily lives as the spectacle of communication, the relentless appearance of communication, which conceals the real silence of people beneath the chatter of money.

What makes money? Machines. Machines make money. Money is created by mechanical action, by the seamless connection of motion between metal monsters, human flesh, scarred land, and plastic gadgets. Mass society is a machine made of machines. If humans are silent, if we have come to behave as human resources—as the idea of money in human vessels, as “commodity mules”—we also must be viewed as the reflection of the machine: predictable, mechanistic, manageable, dead.

## **We are so lonely because we have no one to talk to**

In this world commodities speak, and humans shut up. Value—the price of each commodity, the price of each material and abstract concept of our world—has been determined by the merchant sorcerers conspiring with their technological sky god. Whether we are talking about Capital's exchange value and use value, or the GDP of the nation, value always comes with a price. Value is what makes clean water have a determined quantifiable relationship to a 50-watt light bulb or a 30-minute dog walk without anyone having to say a thing. Conversation disappears because debate about the peculiarity of each individual interaction, product of work, or desire is predetermined by value. We never name the price. All human interactions are economized as a result, as conversation and exchange are subordinated to techno-logic.

The commodity is the merchant's magical technique of efficiently rendering everything equivalent to everything else. Under the magical spell of the commodity, everything is everything, and everything is nothing. Each dynamic human relation is flattened by this equivalence that standardizes everything into nothing. The most horrific and recognizable indication of this is the explosion of people who report having no friend—that is “no one to confide in” or “no one to go to with a problem.” People who have no one to talk to.

## **We have no one to talk to because we have nothing to say**

We have nothing to say because commodities do all the talking, and machines do all the creating. Technocapital has engulfed the entire fabric of the conceptual world and created a situation in which everything is predetermined and pre-fabricated by the economy. The peculiar fetish of the rulers of this society is to scrutinize and manage every second of our time and transform them into machines to make money. It is critical, then, for each of us to be simultaneously isolated for production analysis, and considered in our productive capacities in aggregate. Docility, passivity, and silence help too. Some of us are slated to disappear and some to manage the cogs of the machine, but living as a human animal in group is simply out of the question.

We passively consume the events offered up by the owners of society as individuals, all 7+ billion of us. Not one of us is a signatory of a single International Trade Agreement. Will some leftist moron demand granting us the right to be signatories of these documents? To be signatories of this society?

*You sit down to dinner Perhaps another person eats near you. Someone else is there, but really, you have no one to see. First, you ask, "How was your day?" Which means, "What happened at work today?" You answer. At some point you discuss the food. You look at your plate, and see: \$3.38. A good savings, considering what it would have cost to eat out. You reflect on how proud you are for having had the discipline to cook a pleasant meal for two even though you were so tired from your job. Next, you mention the latest in media spectacles, both factual and fictitious, but really who cares about the difference between them anymore? Dinner concludes and you muster the energy to clean up. As you wash the dishes, it occurs to you that not including the labor time for preparing and cleaning, the food-stuff for dinner cost you about 15 minutes of your time at your job. "Who can't spare 15 minutes?" you think! After the dishes are stacked, you call a person you met at work to see what they are up to. You are not all at surprised to learn they have had a very similar evening.*

## **We will not live as things that think about money**

There is no scientifically-determined relationship between the price of an apple and an iPhone other than the science of slavery. It is only the efficient economizing of others' time that creates the illusion of a determined price. It is techno-merchant magic. None of these quantities are our own creation. They arrive as if ordained by God. And so, if we submit to them, if we passively make our purchases, we create less and less of our world, of the texture of our daily life, and as a result we transform more and more into the things that think about money: commodities, screaming their prices, their precise relation to all other things, including our time, while our relationship to other creatures grows more estranged, remote, and impenetrable.

## **We will not live in the complete absence of meaning**

If money, value, and their material embodiment in the commodity abolish communication by pre-exchanging products of work without any say by wage-slaves, machines and mass organizations abolish the power process by pre-accomplishing all meaningful creative work. The situation we face is the complete absence of the ability to create the necessities of life and the complete

absence of the ability to communicate to infuse life with spirit and connection. At the level of meaning, of spirit, of trust, techno-capital's autonomous functioning gets you coming and going!

## **You are not alone, except in dealing with the entirety of your life.**

"Mental health" emerges as a new concept in techno-capital's universe because the slaves of this world are deprived of it, so its absence appears and it is treated in a mechanistic fashion. Psychotherapists are the mechanics of techno-capital's human resources division. In the isolation of the therapist's workshop the privileged wage slave gets to buy back the appearance of their sanity, the illusion of a remedy for the absence of meaning and communication. Psychiatrists have even found a way to turn a profit for pharmaceutical companies off their crushing of human communion. The vast masses who cannot access the smoke-and-mirror show of therapy and psychiatry are forced to endure on more crass modes of release such as domestic violence, and drug and alcohol addiction. Everyone's got their thing in this paradise.

## **We feel the urge to explode just the same as you do**

Humans have been domesticated into techno-capital's vision of the world—the commodity—so effectively, that each individual is a commodity, eats commodities, and almost exclusively talks about commodities. Everyone and everything has a price in this world. This creates the spectacle of society, the endless horror show of false smiles and cash exchanges through bulletproof glass in corner stores, and electrons on Amazon.com. Many of us behave as actors in roles, actually dressed in costumes, during the majority of our waking hours.

According to this world, nothing is priceless. Only nothing can be infused with meaning. But this void of meaning, where nothing is meaning, has generated a daily life that is populated with the most grotesque and inscrutable moments of explosive rage and terrorism against itself. The civilians are terrorizing each other as civilians, not as militant terrorists. The civilians have taken the terror upon themselves.

## **You may speak with everyone now that you have nothing to say**

Digital social networks have enabled each individual in the ever-expanding network the possibility of communication with anyone else in the network. It is at the historical moment when we are unable to communicate with anyone that we have nothing to talk about with everyone. This doesn't mean that we don't talk. It is the ever present anxiety that there is nothing to do, and nothing to say that forms the stage for an endless play that leads nowhere, that perpetually defers its second act. This is the horrifying misery of mediocrity and boredom that techno-capital democracies have always promised us. Everyday, wage slaves post, for anyone with the internet to see, that they have done nothing again, that they have said nothing again, that they still are not able to act or speak. If we were to have something to talk about, what we would say? Where might we begin? Are we able to recognize "having something to talk about"? There is still one thing to talk about (we hope!): the negative. Expression of the negative, of the profound dissatisfaction with daily life and the world is the narrow domain of discussion that must be expanded into whatever territories it uncovers. This profound dissatisfaction is the complete absence of

trust, the complete absence of spirit, brought about by the economizing of all our time and all our creativity.

## **If society betrays all desire**

These cybernetic tech scumbags have us confused. It is not that smartphones are enabling us to communicate but that we communicate to enable smartphones. Our genuine desire for communication and connection has been betrayed by the business of telecommunication. Internet and communication tech is one of the leading edges allowing capitalism to soldier on, and it has its eye on every individual on the planet, as evidenced by Facebook's ambition to get laptops to all those who suffer without them in Africa and other annihilated backwaters of techno-capital's third world. If you haven't received the inverted order from your peers to purchase a smartphone, these guys are hellbent on making sure you do soon.

The genius of the new spirit of capitalism is its expansion of the market into the realm of human spirit and its ability to respond to the vagaries of this spirit at the speed of light. Because we are more and more like commodities and because so much communication is monitored and recorded and sold, the more we talk, the more commodification and product development can take place without any intervention. Social media tech firms are making billions selling data to intelligence and marketing agencies so that ads and products can be tailored to our ever changing desires. Now when we talk, it is critical for it to become mediated, and we must be buying and selling at once. This is the democratization of the absence of communication, the democratization of the appearance of communication, the democratization of the Spectacle.

Take your emotional state to be society's creation Today, it is impossible to deny that it is techno-capitalism that has proved to be the source of unalloyed dissatisfaction. Just as the instruments of scientific research create the next generation of \$600 smartphones, technicians in the domain of clinical psychology and medicine are astonished to have uncovered the loneliness epidemic and are ignominiously announcing that its health impacts are more threatening—and less possible to dismiss as a personal choice—than smoking cigarettes. The apologists for this world will use every means at their disposal—armies of intellectually mutilated academics, psycho-therapists, journalist whores, police and corrections officers—to blame loneliness on the lonely, to prevent the publicity of loneliness. We wager they won't be successful.

## **Because nothing satisfies**

We are expected to be satisfied with nothing, and so, nothing satisfies. We suffer from this spiritually barren place at all times. Techno-capital's march eliminates meaning. It necessarily destroys meaning. It equates everything with everything so that nothing can have meaning. It destroys the spirit and puts progress in its place. We are born into and expected to reproduce this hollow, absurd reality and it never satisfies. This world must be destroyed because within it nothing satisfies. We sate our spirits on nothing. It is the addict for whom nothing satisfies. The complete absence of meaning—produced by the profit motive, by utilitarianism, by technological process—nurtures the addictive instinct. A dose of genocide there, a touch of alcoholism here. A stroke of amphetamines for those unruly animals, and finish it off with narcotics and work addiction for the remainder of the mob. Dopamine everywhere. Satiety nowhere.

It is with smartphones that a grotesque union of substance addiction, consumer addiction, and work addiction manifest. The purchase and use of smartphones presents itself as a choice and an obligation at once, and their use has an intimate relationship with addiction, as most clearly evidenced by the mounting reports of digital porn and social media addiction. Work addiction, amplified by precarious labor conditions, is worsened by the increasing requirement to obtain a smartphone in order to be considered for employment, which in turn increases the likelihood of smartphone addiction. Whether jerking off to porno inside a stall of your job's restroom, or receiving a friendly text message reminder about a schedule change with a co-worker while fucking someone you met that afternoon via Tinder, we can't help but notice that responding to the siren of the smartphone generates a certain erotic scandal, with all the familiar let downs and remorse of addiction.

## **Abolish the clock**

If the era of Fordism was exemplified by the techniques that massified the car, clearly our era is exemplified by the techniques that have massified the smartphone. The smartphone is the meta-technology par excellence. It economizes technology, it makes efficiency efficient, it technologizes technology. Unlike the car, the smartphone is much more affordable, and yet is enormously dense in terms of embodied production and energy. Conforming to the trend of the pursuit of the perfection of the commodity, it is the latest and most perfected version of a global product that produces globalism. Let's not forget, of course, that mass production produces alienation.

We are not trying to say smartphones are the cause of all our problems. This is to mistake the total in a detail. But through investigating what the smartphone is, as the most general and modern form of technocapital, we can better illuminate the terrain.

## **Because life is too tense**

Consistent with the march of techno-capital's vision of the world, the smartphone has deepened the bond between the realms of consumption and production, and most importantly, increased efficiency. Our ability to quickly text people all over the planet is a minor benefit of the general speeding of the modern world enabled by these new gadgets. The spread of smartphones to the hips and hands of most Westerners makes the worker always available, and the consumer always at the global marketplace. This allows production to remain in a more unified equilibrium with consumption a la "just in time production", rendering the economy more efficient and making the entire gig economy possible. It is not enough to be thinking about work when you are home and in your dreams, or, even worse, when you don't even have work. Now, work can text you for the most trivial reasons. But it's all good, because you get to order new running shoes online while you eat out at Burger King, which is nice consolation, being that you are eating alone, since you don't have anyone to see anyway. There are no boundaries, except on possessing any genuine human intimacy. It is essential to keep this new breed of slaves busier than ever with nothing in particular. Voided vessels tip more easily.

## **To be on the side of spirit**

If we are all anxious and isolated, it is increasingly difficult to achieve any sense of release, and particularly spiritual release. Voices of the spirits are impossible to hear and respond to beneath the drone of modernity and the weight of our own depression. It is not presently possible to be spiritual, only the idea of spirituality is possible.

Spirit has been destroyed, trust has been destroyed.

Trust is part of the essence of the gift, spirit is the essence of the gift.

Gifts entangle the creatures in the gift exchange in an emerging relationship without an end based on an ever developing trust. With commodities, all relationships are all already over. Spirit is pre-exchanged and pre-packaged. The commodity transforms gifts into nihilism. Techno-capital presupposes the destruction of spirit. All we have left is the evacuated corpse, spirituality, the idea of the possibility of spirit. Spirit has been destroyed and its not going to come back easily or quickly. What appears as spirit today is the appearance of spirit, spirit gone spectacular. And there's nothing we can do to remedy this catastrophe. Not enough gardens, not enough riots, not enough smashing, not enough bombs, not enough books to bring it back. In death, we know spirit will not return. What we choose to do under these circumstances should be nobody's fucking business. And yet it is.

## **Your loneliness is a public health problem**

Nearly half of Americans report that they are not close to anyone any longer. Our tasks, whatever form they take, cannot take place without vaulting the wall of isolation, and herein lies the initial task confronting each of us, the desperate need for authentic communication and action in common that is so often spun-out by activist campaigns that dance around discussions of the essence of modern day misery.

## **Because there are barricades in our hearts**

Isolation forces us to block the forces that isolate us. If the rulers of this society insist on placing barricades between us and everything, if they insist on isolating us more and more, they can only do so by also lodging the idea of their downfall in our hearts in the process. Money and machines and the social isolation that accompanies their conquest calcifies the soul into a dead, passive role— whether that role is to disappear, to labor, or to manage. But the barricading of communication and communion contains the idea of its opposite and sometimes overflows its isolating function and backfires.

Barricades bloom organically like seeds sitting dormant for many seasons and people are yanked to them as though moved by some alien force. This is the force of their species-being, their connectedness to place and to spirit, the force of the ancestors. It is the force that draws us out of our isolation and into communication.

But the barricades are not always erected and aflame. In the meantime, we must stick together and survive, grinding out and tending to the small spaces that we already have where we can at least meet or collaborate briefly to build the little worlds of our dreams.

# Stand-up to be Performed at the Next Disaster by Skoden

How's everyone doing out there tonight? You guys are great. So, recently I was watching a movie about the Wounded Knee massacre... Too soon? People tell me I have a dry sense of humor. They tell me I'm dead-pan. Oops I said dead-pan. You can expect more black humour. Did you see that Dave Chappelle special where he met a real Indian at a casino and he said "Shit, I thought you were dead"? People tell me I have a dry sense of humor, but I prefer the term stoic. Anyone who's ever been to a Pow-Wow knows that the MC is a master of anti humor. If a punchline lands something has gone seriously wrong. Think Dad Jokes amplified by a powerful loudspeaker and centuries of incest taboos. I promise it's all a joke, but it might get pretty dark in here. I'll accept your nervous laughter and forced smiles. Social convention dictates that comedians should never punch down, but what about sideways? In all honesty, a lot of Natives, especially the politically minded ones, are way too serious. And not in the straight-faced for comedic effect sort of way. Anarchists also rarely act like clowns publicly, at least not on purpose. There is obviously plenty to be morose about. Anarchists and Native Americans share affinity by being the great losers of history. They cut kids hair in the boarding schools. Women had their heads shaved in Franco's Spain. That's no very funny, right? Not as funny as losing your hair in a vending machine accident.

Maybe indigenous anarchy isn't just another political program that will eventually fail, like they all do, but an existential question. It's about finding a way to live in a world that thinks we're all dead. For me that means humor as an act of decolonial presence. In other words, if I can't shit myself laughing I don't want to be in your revolution. Or against that old saying "If you're brown you have to frown." That's not actually an old saying, I just made it up. Because we're in an unknown frontier we get to create neologisms and new metaphors. "As toothless as a slogan, as naked as a priest" What I'm offering here are real world solutions to problems that are incomprehensible and unsolvable. The scene was already set before we possessed consciousness, so dream analysis is just as important as getting woke.

Freud is mostly remembered for his heavy white cocaine habit. This allegation is said offhandedly to discredit his psychological theories. His ideas, like the anal stage and penis envy, seem outdated now, but if talking about buttholes still makes us laugh, i think he was at least partially correct. Maybe more damning in some circles is the fact that he was a white man with a white beard. Lacan holds up a little better. Masculine and feminine drives exist in all of us regardless of genitals or imposed gender. Why bring up psychoanalysis and make you think about their likely white pubic hairs when the topic is native americans? Did I mention that I'm a Native American myself? I'm wearing a Cleavland Indians jersey so you can't see my dope tribal tattoos or tell that my body is naturally hairless, but i assure you, im as smooth as a river otter. I mention Freud and Lacan because the way they talk about recognition from the Other for ego development can be helpful for understanding indige- neity. Being an Indian is impossible without a time machine or



an orgone accumulator. I wonder about things like why the culturally appropriative transracialism of a Rachel Dolezal is so much more offensive than the transgender transitioning of a Caitlyn Jenner. Isn't all this stuff just socially constructed? Imagine Rachel Dolezal transported in time to the Jim Crow south trying to explain herself. Now imagine Caitlyn Jenner, a century in the future, pleading in front of intersectional jury.

My tribe is much closer to the Canadian border than Mexico, but people always think I'm latinx. People always come up to me speaking Spanish. I feel kind of embarrassed that I'm not more fluent. Soy indio. I feel inadequate because I was only able to learn one colonial language. It's uncomfortable for me but I understand the confusion. I'm more of a Snow Mexican if anything. A northern indian. A rarer pokemon. I once went to a bbq hosted by some people from the Philippines and they all believed me when I told them I was half Filipino, until I wouldn't eat the roasted entrails. True story. I've also been Lebanese, Palestinian, and Egyptian before. I even pretended to be Italian for a night so I could sleep with a skinhead girl. I know now that racism isn't an excuse for misogyny, but I was really drunk and she was stupid thicc. If I'm sometimes guilty of being white passing it's never at a job interview or after getting pulled over.

Im clearly trying to ruffle a few feathers here. I know how this all sounds, but it's possible to make statements like these because we live in a society that gets nauseous in the changing room. I didn't read Franz Fanon, don't tell anyone, but even before colonization what we call the west has been trapped in double-edged thinking. Cats at war with dogs. Crusaders versus the Moors. Men are strong and rational, whereas girls are icky. These imaginary oppositions affect us. We know that even if God is invisible he still has a penis. I mention Freud because i like to talk about White People Shit. I like white people shit like going to the opera or singing along to Migos songs. To be honest a mirror makes sense when talking about race and gender. You look in a mirror and ask "is that me"? No matter what you see it reaffirms your own identity. I know what it's like to be racially infantilized. I know how it feels when grown women call me daddy. I mention river otters because even if the arbitrary distinction between human and nonhuman, civilization and wilderness, is one of the oldest and most harmful myths, I would still rather go swimming than go to work.

Chief "Iron Eyes" Cody was one of the most successful personalities in a long and still vibrant tradition of make-believe Indians. He appeared in tons of westerns. He's the guy in the commercial shedding a single tear when he sees how polluted every thing has become. It's the kind of thing that makes you want to throw beer cans in the street just to defy stereotypes. But, he's interesting because it seems like he came to believe that he was really Indian. He started wearing braids and buckskin off set. He took a native wife, had Indian children, and was more or less accepted by a tribal community. I always say that everyone should try to become Indian as much as they can, but maybe I didn't think this through. It's supposed to be a metaphor like "the grass is always greener" Little boys don't actually want to kill their fathers to have sex with their mothers do they? Why do people like to play Indian when the Cowboys always win? I guess the poverty, alcoholism, and diabetes are a small price to pay for being able to turn yourself into a werewolf. Wolves are a lot cooler normal dogs, but dogs get rabies shots and squeaky toys and belly rubs. (Wolves don't get neutered) Sometimes I think about what it would be like to pretend to be a white person for a day. Maybe drive a Prius to burning man with my poly-triad while marinating on my privilege? Or road rage in a MAGA hat while diesel exhaust tickles down my mudflaps? It's hard to pin down exactly what a white person is. A real "can't see the forest for the trees" situation. At what point does a metaphor become a cliché?

The topic of assimilation, that fancy word for, “pretend you’re me, or I’ll kill you” is a more serious topic I guess. I mean that whole missionary system stuff wasn’t very chill. But, the thing is, in my own life I have always spoken english, worn pants, and received my vaccinations. Another aspect of native identity is not wanting to be someone else’s walking tragedy forever either. I’ve seen that photo of the frozen bodies at Wounded Knee way more times than I wanted to. Being as assimilated as I am, I understand when something is Shaksperian. Native genocide was kind of like that Romeo and Juliet movie, the one with John Liguzamo. You know. Juliette faked her death for some reason and Romeo committed suicide because he loved her so much? It’s tragic because in the audience we know it didn’t have to end like that. It was all just a big misunderstanding. They should have been together, but the stars were crossed. Something similarly ironic happened in the story of conquest. A nobler, but more naive character was killed off by a stronger dumber one. It’s tragic because everyone would probably be happier if none of that shit happened and we all lived like Indians.

Freud doesn’t really talk specifically about what the effects of conquest might be for the colonized, but in *Civilization and Its Discontents* he gives us the impression that living in societies like ours means repressing most of our instincts. Living in our world means anxiety and depression. Dread and anticipation. Just like with native storytelling, Psychoanalytic material is open to interpretation. Early man put out the phallus-like tongues of fires by urinating on the flames. When he learned to suppress this homosexual urge, he was able to control fire and used it to become civilized. People sometimes compare the earth-diver story of Turtle Island’s creation to the Prometheus myth. Marx and Engles, who honestly wrote about Indians way more than the classical Anarchists, told a similar story about how life used to be better. Indians liked sharing, being friends, and playing games, just like what you’re supposed to do in kindergarten. Liberte, egalite, fraternite. Civilization was created in order to protect ourselves from nature, but that kind of strategy has diminishing returns. One day you’re inventing the wheel and making pictographs and the next thing you know “Family” is a popular category on Pornhub and the earth’s temperature is several degrees hotter.

There are other ways to tell the same tale. I want to avoid the monomyth, or hero’s journey that Joseph Cambell described. Meaning that every story is really just the same story. Star Wars is the common example. Navajo Star Wars seems awesome, but pretty much anything sounds cool if you put Navajo in front of it. It’s more fun to look for tangents that lead to unexpected places. What would *Dances With Wolves* be like if Kevin Costner got killed-off in the first scene? One tactic indigenous anarchists might use to subvert the three-act play formula could be to use the joke format: setup expectations and defy them. Knock knock. Who’s there? Assassinate Johnny Depp.

I found out about the Red Lake massacre after I got out of the sweat lodge at the South Dakota State Penitentiary. Jeff Wiese committed a mass shooting against other members of his tribe in the ultimate act of White People Shit. It’s hard to think of something funny to say about a massacre, but I can try. In the sweat lodge, when we close a prayer by saying “all my relations” That means ALL our relationships. These prayers will often remember to include all the other creatures: two-legged, fourlegged, the winged creatures and even the creepy crawlers. I always laugh when they say creepy crawlers. Bugs and worms. Eww gross. The point is, everyone is related and deserves our respect. Even white people. Even would be school shooters. Isn’t it weird that some indians referred to the Keystone pipeline as an evil snake? What’s wrong with snakes? Isn’t that actually some biblical symbolism? I’m not saying that we are related to oil lines, but if I take animism

seriously then even plutonium has a spirit. A bad spirit right? Did Indians believe in Good And Evil? During the Chernobyl Disaster some miners got naked as they tunneled under the reactor to contain the meltdown. It's kind of funny because because their balls were out, flopping around getting fully irradiated. Sometimes when being an Indian gets too hard I tell myself "At least I don't have Acute Radiation Poisoning" Your skin melts off and your eyes bleed. No thanks. In the sweat lodge we get naked too, but it's in a sacred way so don't laugh. I do think about moving to Chernobyl, like I think most people do. Not as much traffic.

I do really think about going and homesteading at Chernobyl. There's a bunch of radioactive wolves and it's all post-apocalyptic. Don't we all want that cozy catastrophe to happen? Maybe there are zombies around every corner. Maybe an unexplainable super contagion. But, you don't have to stand in line at the DMV. You don't have to shave your legs. Presumably you don't have to recycle anymore. I imagine it's hard to be a liberal environmentalist in that situation, trying to find biodegradable ammo, or trying to get people to sign a petition for humanitarian efforts for the undead. Part of the draw of apocalypse is that you don't have to deal with so many people. You get to looting, go through people's underwear drawers. We can go to Chernobyl. I'm being serious here. I like the idea of doing some Mad Max shit, but i'm not sure if a major collapse will go down like they're depicted in Hollywood.

Prison movies aren't very faithful in my experience. Romantic Comedies are definitely engaged in some bleak dystopian world building. Sitcoms seem vaguely threatening if you remove the laugh track. Most of the tropes in prison movies do exist in real life to some extent. Getting poked or poking someone else is definitely a possibility. To really get the experience on film it would be a lot more boring. It would be more like one of those found footage movies but nothing happens. Just a fixed surveillance camera pointed at a person in a cell. The movie would be a minimum of ten hours long. It seems like there are more prison comedies than post-apocalyptic comedies for some reason. It's hilarious when someone drops the soap, but not so much when Toecutters gang chases after your family. I imagine the coming Indigenous Anarchism film starring Adam Beach will be closer avant garde experimentation than cinema verite.

*Groundhog's Day* starring Bill Murray beautifully illustrates Nietzsche's wheel of Eternal Return. You have to keep living the same thing over and over again. That's more like what prison is like. It's more Sisyphean, but that's also just what daily life is like in general. Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, casinos, contest powwows, and protest marches, which all resemble prisons? In prison you wake up, eat, work out, and watch Lockup Raw. And really, the sex isn't even that great. The really tragic thing about the apocalypse for natives is that it happened and we have to deal with even more people. If zombies are a stand-in for colonists, imagine a world where your boss, neighbor, or boyfriend is a zombie.

Because I wanted to find something better to do than watching movies and committing felonies, I went to Standing Rock. I put on a leather headband bigger than Dennis Bank's. I found one that could stretch across the Bering Strait. I talked with one of those good allies that always sit cross legged. She told me a story about some people who died in a sweat lodge in Arizona. "New Agers I'm assuming?" I asked. No. Spirit Warriors, some of them were even part Cherokee.

At the end of the day, being an anarchistic Native, that is to say a sentient being who believes that the non-sentient have interests, is not at all like a novel or a movie, it's performance art. For some of us it means dressing up in Furry costumes representing our clan totems. (Look out for me at the next rally dressed in whiteface, digging my teeth into the shoulders of grant writers.) Expecting to get our land back is just about as absurd as thinking the world will have a happy

ending, but be ready to be pleasantly surprised. I'm doing my part. I'm ready and willing to do a jump-scare on my therapist from behind his office couch. The situation is pretty desperate so anything is worth a shot. I'll leave you with some sage wisdom. In side of each of us are two wolves. One of them got away and left a hole in your screen door. The other looks ashamed when they poop. Which one will you feed?

Thanks for coming out folks. Don't forget to tip the bartender.

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